

e Circus Boys In Dixie Land, Or Winning the Plaudits of the Sunny

Edgar B P Darlington

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CHAPTER I. UNDER CANVAS AGAIN

"I reckon the fellows will turn out to see us tomorrow night, Teddy."

"I hope so, Phil. We'll show them that we are real circus performers, won't we?"

Phil Forrest nodded happily.

"They know that already, I think. But we shall both feel proud to perform in our home town again. They haven't seen us in the ring since the day we first joined the show two years ago, and then it was only a little performance."

"Remember the day I did a stunt in front of the circus billboard back home?"

"And fell in the ditch, head first? I remember it," and Phil Forrest laughed heartily.

"You and I weren't circus men then, were we?"

"No."

"But we are now."

"I guess we are," nodded Phil with emphasis. "Still, we have something to learn yet. We are a couple of lucky boys, you and I, Teddy Tucker. Had it not been for Mr. Sparling we might still have been doing chores for our board in Edmeston."

"Instead, we are getting our envelopes with sixty dollars apiece in them from the little red ticket wagon every Tuesday morning, eh?"

"Just so."

"I never thought I'd be able to earn so much money as that in a whole year," reflected Teddy.

"Nor I."

"Do you think we'll get any more 'raises' this season?"

"I haven't the least idea that we shall. You know our contracts are signed for the season at sixty dollars a week. That surely should be enough to satisfy us. We shall be able to save a whole lot of money, this year; and, if we have good luck, in five years more we'll be able to have a little show of our own."

Teddy agreed to this with a reflective nod.

"What kind of show?"

"Well, that remains to be seen," laughed Phil. "We shall be lucky to have most any kind."

"Do you know what sort I'd like to have?"

"No. What kind?"

"Wild West show, a regular Buffalo Bill outfit, with wild Indians, cowboys, bucking ponies and whoop! whoop! Hi-yi-yi! You know?"

Teddy's eyes were glowing with excitement, while a dull red glow showed beneath the tan on his face.

"I wouldn't get so excited about it," answered Phil, highly amused.

"How'd you like that kind?"

"Not at all. It's too rough. Give me the circus every time, with its life, its color, it's—oh, pshaw! What's the use talking about it? Is there anything in the world more attractive than those tents over there, with the flags of every nation flying from center and quarter poles? Is there, Teddy?"

"Well, no; I guess that's right."

For a moment the lads were silent. They were sitting beneath a spreading maple tree off, on the circus lot, a few rods from where the tents were being erected. A gentle breeze was stirring the flags, billowing the white canvas of the tents in slow, undulating waves.

"And to think that we belong to that! Do you know, sometimes I think it is all a dream, and I'm afraid I shall suddenly wake up to find myself back in Edmeston with Uncle Abner Adams driving me out of the house with a stick."

Phil's face grew solemn as those unhappy days under his uncle's roof came back to him in a flood of disquieting memories.

"Don't wake up, then," replied Teddy.

"I think perhaps we had better both wake up if we expect to get any breakfast. The red flag is flying on the

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cook tent, which means that breakfast is ready—in fact, breakfast must be pretty well over by this time. First thing we know the blue flag will suddenly appear in its place, and you and I will have to hustle downtown for something to eat. It will be parade time pretty soon, too."

"Breakfast? Say, Phil, I'd forgotten all about breakfast."

"There must be something wrong with you, then, if you forget when it's meal time. As for myself, I have an appetite that would put the Bengal tiger to shame. Come along."

"I'm with you. I'll show you whether my appetite has a reef in it or not. I can eat more than the living skeleton can, and for a thin man he's got anything stopped for appetite that I ever saw," answered Teddy Tucker, scrambling to his feet and starting for the cook tent.

Yes; Teddy Tucker and Phil Forrest are the same boys who, two seasons before, began their circus career by joining a road show, each in a humble capacity. It will be remembered how in "THE CIRCUS BOYS ON THE FLYING RINGS," Teddy and Phil quickly rose to be performers in the ring; how Phil, by his coolness and bravery, saved the life of one of the performers at the imminent risk of losing his own; how he saved the circus from a great pecuniary loss, as well as distinguishing himself in various other ways.

In "THE CIRCUS BOYS ACROSS THE CONTINENT," the lads won new laurels in their chosen career, when Phil became a bareback rider, scoring a great hit at his first performance. It will be recalled too, how the circus lad proved himself a real hero at the wreck of the dining car, saving the lives of several persons, finally being himself rescued by his companion, Teddy Tucker.

The Great Sparling Combined Shows had been on the road a week, and by this time the various departments had gotten down to fairly good working order, for, no matter how perfect such an organization may be, it requires several days for the show people to become used to working together. This extends even to the canvassmen and roustabouts. After being a few weeks out they are able to set the tents in from half an hour to an hour less time than it takes during the first two or three stands of the season.

The next stand was to be Edmeston, the home of the two Circus Boys. The lads were looking forward with keen expectation to the moment when, clad in tights and spangles, they would appear before their old school fellows in a series of daring aerial flights.

The lads had spent the winter at school and now only one year more was lacking to complete their course at the high school that they had been attending between circus seasons, practicing in their gymnasium after school hours.

"I'd like to invite all the boys of our class to come to the show on passes. Do you suppose Mr. Sparling would let me?"

"I am afraid you had better not ask him," laughed Phil. "If you were running a store do you think you would ask the crowd to come over and help themselves to whatever they wanted?"

"Well, no—o."

"I thought not."

"But this is different."

"Not so much so. It would be giving away seats that could be sold and that probably will be sold. No; I guess the boys had better pay for their seats."

Teddy looked disappointed.

"Don't you think it is worth fifty cents to see us perform?" queried Phil.

Teddy grinned broadly. The idea appealed to him in a new light.

"That's so. I guess it's worth more than fifty cents, at that. I guess I don't care if they do have to pay, but I want them to come to the show. What do you suppose I've been working two years for, if it wasn't to show off before the fellows? Haven't you?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Why, what do you think?"

"I don't think. It's too hot to think this morning."

"All right. Wait till someday when the weather is cooler; then think the matter over," laughed Phil, hurrying on toward where breakfast was waiting for them in the cook tent.

The lads were performing the same acts in which they had appeared the previous season; that is, doing the

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flying rings as a team, while Phil was a bareback rider and Teddy a tumbler. Something had happened to the bucking mule that Teddy had ridden for two seasons, and the manager had reluctantly been forced to take this act from his bill.

"I'm thinking of getting another mule for you, if we can pick up such a thing," said Mr. Sparling at breakfast that morning.

Teddy's eyes twinkled. He had in mind a surprise for the manager, but was not quite ready to tell of his surprise yet. All during the winter the lad had been working with a donkey that he had picked up near Edmeston. His training of the animal had been absolutely in secret, so that none of his school fellows, save Phil, knew anything about it.

"All right," answered Teddy carelessly. "Wait till we get to Edmeston and see what we can pick up there."

Mr. Sparling bent a shrewd, inquiring glance on the impassive face of the Circus Boy. If he suspected Teddy had something in mind that he was not giving voice to, Mr. Sparling did not mention it. By this time he knew both boys well enough to form a pretty clear idea when there was anything of a secret nature in the wind.

"We'll never get another mule like Jumbo," he sighed.

"Hope not," answered Teddy shortly.

"Why not?"

" 'Cause, I don't want to break my neck this season, at least not till after we've passed Edmeston and the fellows have seen perform."

"So that's it, is it?"

"It is. I'm going to show myself tomorrow, and I don't care who knows it."

"If I remember correctly you already have shown yourself pretty thoroughly all the way across the continent."

"And helped fill the big top at the same time," added Teddy, with a shrewd twinkle in his eyes.

Mr. Sparling laughed outright.

"I guess you have a sharp tongue this morning."

"I don't mean to have."

"It's all right. I accept your apology. What's this you say about the fellows—whom do you mean?"

"He means our class at the high school," Phil informed the showman.

"Oh, yes. How many are there in the class?"

"Let me see—how many are there, Teddy?"

"Thirty or forty, not counting the fat boy who's the anchor in the tug of war team. If you count him there are five more."

"I presume they'll all be wanting to come to the show?" questioned Mr. Sparling.

"Any fellow who doesn't come is no friend of mine."

"That's the way to talk. Always have the interest of the show in mind, and you'll get along," smiled the owner.

"We—e—l—l," drawled the lad. "I wasn't just thinking about the interest of the show. I was thinking more about what a figure I'd be cutting before the boys."

Mr. Sparling laughed heartily.

"You are honest at any rate, Master Teddy. That's one thing I like about you. When you tell me a thing I do not have to go about asking others to make sure that you have told me the truth."

"Why shouldn't I? I'm not afraid of you."

"No; that's the worst of it. I should like to see something you really are afraid of."

"I know what he is afraid of," smiled Phil maliciously.

"What?" demanded Mr. Sparling.

"He is afraid of the woman snake charmer under the black top. He's more afraid of her than he is of the snakes themselves. Why, you couldn't get him to shake hands with her if you were to offer him an extra year's salary. There she is over there now, Teddy."

Teddy cast an apprehensive glance at the freak table, where the freaks and side show performers were laughing and chatting happily, the Lady Snake Charmer sandwiched in between the Metal-faced Man and Jo-Jo the Dog-faced Wonder.

"I've been thinking of an idea, Mr. Sparling," said Teddy by way of changing the subject.

Phil glanced at him apprehensively, for Teddy's ideas were frequently attended by consequences of an

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unpleasant nature.

"Along the usual line young man?"

"Well, no."

"What is your idea?"

"I've been thinking that I should like to sign up as a dwarf for the rest of the season and sit on the concert platform in the menagerie tent. It wouldn't interfere with my other performance," said Teddy in apparent seriousness.

Mr. Sparling leaned back, laughing heartily.

"Why, you are not a dwarf."

"No-o-o. But I might be."

"How tall are you?"

"A little more than five feet," answered the lad with a touch of pride in his tone.

"You are almost a man. Why, Teddy, you are a full twenty inches taller than the tallest dwarf in the show."

Teddy nodded.

"Don't you see you could not possibly be a dwarf?"

"Oh, yes, I could. All the more reason why I could."

"What kind of a dwarf would you be, may I ask?"

"I could be the tallest dwarf on earth, couldn't I?" asked Teddy, gazing at his employer innocently.

Everyone at the table broke out into a merry peal of laughter, while Teddy Tucker eyed them sadly for a moment; then he too added his laughter to theirs.

"If you were not already getting a pretty big salary for a kid, I'd raise your salary for that," exploded Mr. Sparling.

"You can forget I'm getting so much, if you want to," suggested Teddy humorously.

CHAPTER II. IN THEIR HOME TOWN

"Hey, Phil!"

"What is it, Teddy?"

"Wake up! We are in the old town again."

Phil Forrest pulled aside the curtain and peered out from his berth into the railroad yards, the bright May sunshine flooding the old familiar scenes at Edmeston. Far off he could just make out the red brick chimney of his Uncle Abner's home.

What recollections it brought back to Phil Forrest—recollections that went back still further to a sweet face and laughing eyes his mother!

Phil dropped the curtain and lay face down in the pillow for a moment.

"I say, Phil."

"What is it?" demanded the lad in a muffled voice.

"Guess who's out there?"

"I don't know."

"The gang's out there."

"Who?"

"The gang. The whole high school crowd."

"Oh!"

"They're looking for us. Lucky we're on the last section, for if it was dark, we couldn't make much of a splurge getting off the train. Aren't you going to get up?"

"Yes."

Phil slowly pulled himself from his berth, then began drawing on his clothes. Teddy was already up and nearly dressed, full of expectation of what was before him. For Phil there was something that tinged his joy with sadness, though he could not make up his mind why it should be so. His reverie was broken in upon by the voice of Teddy Tucker.

"Come, hurry up!"

"I am all ready now," answered Phil. "Have you washed?"

"You bet. I always wash the first thing in the morning."

Together the Circus Boys stepped out on the platform. There, lined up by the side of the track, were their companions and school fellows waiting to welcome them.

The high school boys uttered a shout when they espied Phil and Teddy.

"How'dy, fellows!" greeted Teddy, posing on the car platform for a moment, that they might gaze upon him admiringly.

Phil was already on the ground, hurrying toward the boys with both hands outstretched. A moment more and the two lads had been grabbed by their schoolmates and literally overwhelmed, while a crowd of villagers stood off against a pile of lumber, laughing and calling out greetings to the Circus Boys.

Phil and Teddy, as soon as they were able to get away, hurried to the circus lot for their breakfast. There they found a great crowd of people whom they knew, and for a few minutes they were kept busy shaking hands, after which the boys with faces wreathed in smiles, proudly entered the cook tent. Teddy glanced up quizzically when they got inside.

"Well I guess we're some, eh, Phil?"

"I guess so. I hope everything goes all right today. I should die of mortification if anything were to happen to our acts. You want to keep your mind right on your work today. Don't pay any attention to the audience. Remember a whole lot of people are coming to this show today just because they are interested in you and me."

"I guess I know how to perform," sputtered Teddy.

"I haven't said you do not. I know you do, but I don't want you to forget that you do."

"Look out for yourself. I'll take care of myself," growled Teddy.

"I'm going to."

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Having finished their breakfast the boys started for the village, to call on Mrs. Cahill, their guardian and the custodian of their earnings. As they were leaving the grounds, Phil paused suddenly.

"Look there," he said, pointing to Mr. Sparling's office tent.

"Well, if it isn't Billy Ford, the president of our class," breathed Teddy. "I didn't see him at the train when we came in this morning; did you?"

"No. He wasn't there."

"Now, what do you suppose he is doing in Mr. Sparling's tent?"

"I haven't the least idea unless he is trying to find out where we are. Hey, Billy!"

Billy Ford paused at the sound of the familiar call; then the Circus Boys hurried toward him. Billy went suddenly red in the face as if he were very much embarrassed.

"What you doing in there?" demanded Teddy.

"Why—why—perhaps I was trying to join the show," stammered Billy.

"We wouldn't have you. You and I couldn't travel in the same show. They'd fire us both."

"Why?" questioned Billy, now regaining his presence of mind.

"'Cause, between us we'd put the show out of business."

"I believe you would," nodded Phil.

"Where you going, boys?"

"Mrs. Cahill's."

"Then I'll walk down that way with you. What time do you get through at night?"

"We finish our last act about ten o'clock," answered Phil. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing much. I just wanted to know."

Phil shot a swift, suspicious glance at the schoolboy, but Billy's face bore an expression as serene as the May morning of that very day.

Mr. Sparling hailed the lads as they were leaving the lot.

"You may be excused from parade today, both of you. You no doubt will want to spend all the time you can with your friends."

"Thank you," smiled Phil. "There's the finest man a fellow ever worked for."

"Worked? Do you call performing in a circus work?"

"Well, at least it is a pretty good imitation of work, Billy."

"I used to think just like you do," added Teddy rather ruefully.

"Is it really work then?"

"Oh, no; it's just play. Come to the show and you will see us play."

"By the way," inquired Phil, "the fellows are all coming this afternoon, I suppose?"

"Yes, but not this afternoon."

"Evening?"

"Yes."

"That will be fine. We have a short run tonight, so the boss will not be in any hurry to move the show. You'll see it all."

"Why, don't you always give it all?"

"No. Sometimes, when the weather is bad, or when we have a long run before us, Mr. Sparling cuts some of the acts out entirely, and shortens others. But, of course, the audience doesn't know this."

"Is that so?" wondered the surprised Billy.

"Yes. Are you boys all going to sit together?"

"Yes. We'll be where we can see you. And the girls are going to be there, too. I reckon the whole school will be on hand."

"How about Uncle Abner—will he go to the show, do you think?"

"I know where you'll find him," spoke up Teddy.

"Where?"

"You'll find him hiding behind the hen house watching the parade go by. He won't dare show himself after the way the clowns had fun with him when the show was here before."

"Poor Uncle Abner! I must go over and see him after we have called on Mrs. Cahill."

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Arriving at Mrs. Cahill's, they found her out in the yard, arrayed in her best dress in honor of their coming, and it was a joyful meeting between the three. In a short time, however, Teddy grew restless and decided that he would wander about town and call on his other friends.

"I'll tell you what let's do, Teddy," suggested Phil.

"What?"

"You come back before parade time and we three will sit on the front door step and watch the parade go by, just as we used to do before we went into the show business. I'll run over to see Uncle Abner in the meantime, and we will both be back here by half-past ten. The parade will not get along before then."

"Yes, do, boys," urged Mrs. Cahill. "I'll have a lunch for you after the parade. You will like that, will you not?"

"I should say we shall," laughed Phil. "But, I had rather thought you might like to eat with us under the circus tent."

"Oh, my, my! Eat with the circus?"

"Not with the animals, he doesn't mean," corrected Teddy. "He means we should like to have you eat with we performers."

"Yes, with the performers," grinned Phil.

"Can I eat there with you just as well after the afternoon performance?"

"Surely."

"Then we will have our noon meal here. I have some fresh molasses cookies already baked for you."

"Cookies?" Teddy's eyes brightened.

"Yes; do you want some now?"

"I always want cookies. Never knew a time when I didn't. I want 'em when I'm awake, and I want 'em when I'm asleep."

He got a double handful in short order.

"Well, I'm off!" announced Teddy.

"How about the parade? Will you come back and see it from here?"

"Yes; I guess that would be some fun. I can make faces at the other performers who have to work. Yes; I'll come back."

"Don't forget about the donkey," called Phil. "When are you going to take him over to the horse tent?"

"I'm not going to give myself away by leading that fright through the streets. I've fixed it with one of the hostlers to smuggle him over to the stable tent," grinned Teddy.

"Taking him in this afternoon?"

"Not I. Saving that for a grand surprise tonight. What are you going to do to surprise the fellows?"

"I hadn't thought. Nothing quite so sensational as your feat will be, I guess," laughed Phil.

In the course of an hour both lads had returned to Mrs. Cahill's humble home. But while they were away from the show grounds, the owner of the show, without the knowledge of the lads, had paid a visit to the principal of the school and was back on the lot in time to head the parade when it finally started.

"Kinder wish I had gone in the parade," regretted Teddy.

"Why?"

"Good place to show off."

"You have a much better one."

"Where?"

"In the ring. Anybody can ride a horse in a parade, but not everyone can perform on the flying rings and leap over elephants to boot."

Teddy instinctively threw out his chest.

"You're right, at that. Hark!"

"Yes; they are coming. I can hear Billy English blow the big bass horn. You could hear him over three counties, I really believe."

Laughing and chatting, the boys settled themselves on Mrs. Cahill's hospitable doorstep to await the arrival of the parade which could be heard far off on the other side of the village.

Now and then the high, metallic notes of the calliope rose above all the rest, bringing a glint of pride to the

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eyes of Teddy Tucker.

"I just love that steam music machine."

"Well, I must say that I do not admire your taste," laughed Phil. "It's the most hideous discord of noises I ever heard. I never did like the steam piano, but a circus wouldn't be a circus without it."

"Nope," agreed Teddy with emphasis.

Down the street a gorgeously colored rainbow slowly reached around a bend and began straightening away toward the Cahill home. The parade was approaching.

As the gay procession drew nearer the boys began to evince some of the enthusiasm that they had known before they themselves had become a part of the big show.

"Remember the parade two years ago, Phil?" asked Mrs. Cahill.

"I could not very well forget it. That was a red letter day in my life, the day when I fell into the show business."

"And that wasn't all you fell in either," added Teddy.

"What else did I fall in?"

"In a ditch when you stopped the runaway pony."

Phil did not laugh. He was thinking.

"That was a lucky fall, too."

"Why?"

"Because it was the means of giving you and me our start in the circus business."

"Hurrah! Here they come. Now see me make faces at them when they go by," said Teddy.

The Cahill home was near the outskirts of the village, and as the golden chariot of the band, glistening in the bright morning sunlight, approached, the lads could not repress an exclamation of delight.

"I used to think the band wagon was solid gold," breathed Teddy.

"When did you find out differently?"

"That day, two years ago, when I scraped off some of the gold with my knife and found it was nothing but wood," grunted Teddy in a disgusted tone.

"What is that band wagon trying to do?" demanded Phil suddenly.

"Guess they are going to turn around," said Teddy.

The six white horses attached to the band wagon slowly drew out of the line just before reaching the Cahill home, and pointed toward the roadside fence. The boys could not understand what the move meant. An instant later the leaders straightened out and began moving along the side of the road close to the fence.

They slowly drew up to the door yard, coming to a stop at the far end of it.

"Wha—wha—" stammered Teddy.

"They are going to serenade us," cried Phil. "That's Mr. Sparling all over. What do you think of that, Mrs. Cahill? You never were serenaded by a circus band before, were you?"

"N—n—no," answered the widow, a little tremulously.

The band wagon drew up a few feet further, coming to a stop again just to the left of the dooryard gate, so as not to interfere with the party's view of the parade.

"There's Mr. Sparling," shouted Phil, as the owner in his handsome carriage drawn by four black horses, came abreast of the yard.

Both boys sprang up and cheered him in their enthusiasm, to which the showman responded by taking off his hat, while the band struck up "Yankee Doodle."

It was a glorious moment for the Circus Boys, and they were even more surprised and gratified by what followed a few moments later.

CHAPTER III. THE CIRCUS MAKES A CALL

While the band played, the clown wagon came to a halt and the whole body of funny men sang a song in front of Mrs. Cahill's house, while the widow and her two young guests applauded enthusiastically.

As the clown's wagon drew on, a horse ridden by a young woman was seen dashing straight at the dooryard fence, which it took in a graceful leap, causing the Widow Cahill to gasp her amazement. The rider was none other than Little Dimples, the star bareback rider of the Sparling Shows, who had chosen this way to pay homage to her young associates and to Mrs. Cahill as well.

It was an unusual procedure in a circus parade, but though it had been arranged by Mr. Sparling out of the kindness of his heart, he shrewdly reasoned that it would make good business for the show as well. That the people lined up along the street agreed with his reasoning was evidenced by their shouts of applause.

"Mrs. Cahill, this is our very good friend, Mrs. Robinson, otherwise known as Little Dimples," announced Phil proudly.

Mrs. Cahill bowed and smiled, not the least bit embarrassed.

"You haven't introduced my pony, Phil. The pony is part of little me, you know."

"I beg pardon, Mrs. Cahill; let me introduce to you Mrs. Robinson's pony, Cinders, who, though he cannot talk, comes pretty close to it," said Phil, with great dignity.

Cinders bowed and bowed, the bits rattling against his teeth until it sounded to the little gathering as if he were trying to chatter his pleasure at the introduction.

"Now, shake hands with Mrs. Cahill, Cinders," directed Little Dimples.

Cinders extended a hoof, which Mrs. Cahill touched gingerly. She was not used to shaking hands with horses. Teddy and Phil, however, each grasped the pony's extended foot, giving it a good shake, after which Phil thrust a lump of sugar into the waiting lips of Cinders.

"Naughty boy!" chided Little Dimples, tapping the neck of her mount with the little riding crop she carried. "You would spoil him in no time. I must be going, now. I hope we shall see you at the show this afternoon, Mrs. Cahill," smiled Dimples, her face breaking out into dimples and smiles.

The widow nodded.

"This afternoon and tonight. She is going to dine with us under the cook tent this afternoon," Phil informed the rider.

"That will be fine."

Dimples nodded, tossed her whip in the air and clucking to Cinders, went bounding over the fence. A moment more and she had taken her place in the line and was moving along with the procession, bowing and smiling.

"That's what I call right fine," glowed Mrs. Cahill. "Did you say that little thing was Mrs. Robinson?"

"Yes."

"Why, she looks like a young girl."

"That's what I thought when I first saw her. But she has a son as old as I am."

"Land sakes!" wondered Mrs. Cahill. "You never can tell about these circus folks, anyhow."

Phil laughed heartily, but Teddy was too much interested in what was going on outside the fence to indulge in laughter. The band was still playing as if its very existence depended upon keeping up the noise, while the white horses attached to the band wagon were frantically seeking to get their heads down for a nibble of the fresh green grass at the side of the road.

"There come the bulls," called Teddy.

"Yes, I see them."

"The bulls?" wondered Mrs. Cahill. "I didn't know they had bulls in the circus."

"That's what the show people call the elephants," laughed Phil. "Teddy is talking show-talk now. We have a language of our own."

"I should say you do?" grumbled the widow.

"What's the bull in front got on his trunk, Phil?"

Phil shaded his eyes and gazed off down the street.

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"That's my friend Emperor. I don't know what it is he is carrying. That's queer. I never saw him carrying anything in parade before, did you?"

"No."

For a moment both lads directed their attention to making out what it was that Emperor was carrying along.

"It looks to me like a basket of flowers," finally decided Phil.

"Has somebody been handing him a bouquet," grunted Teddy.

"It certainly looks that way."

"Why, I really believe he is coming in here."

"Coming here—an elephant coming into my front yard? Mercy me!" exclaimed Mrs. Cahill, starting up.

"Why, Mrs. Cahill, Emperor wouldn't hurt a little baby. I hope he does come in. Sit still. Don't be afraid."

"He'll spoil my flower beds—he'll trample them all down and after I've worked four weeks getting—"

"Yes; here he comes," exulted Phil.

At that moment Emperor, with his trainer, Mr. Kennedy, swung out of line and entered the garden gate. Turning to the left they headed directly across the lawn. The precious flower beds lay right in his path.

"Oh, my flowers! They're ruined," moaned the widow.

"Watch him and you'll see," answered Phil, his face wreathed in smiles.

She did, and her eyes opened wider when Emperor cautiously raised one ponderous foot after another until he had stepped clear of the first bed of flowers. The same thing happened when he got to the second bed. Not even the imprint of his footfalls was left on the fresh green grass of the lawn.

Mrs. Cahill's eyes were large and wondering. A sudden impulse stirred her to spring up and flee into the house.

Phil, noting it, laid a restraining hand lightly, on her arm.

"Don't be afraid," he reassured. "Emperor will not harm you. You see how careful he is of your lawn and your flower beds. I think he is coming here for some purpose."

Emperor and his trainer came to a half right in front of the porch, the elephant's little eyes fixed upon the slender form of Phil Forrest.

"Good boy, Emperor!" breathed Phil. "Did somebody present a basket of flowers to you?"

It was a big basket, and such a handsome collection of flowers did it contain as to cause Mrs. Cahill to open her eyes in wonder. A card was tied to the handle of the basket with a big pink ribbon. Phil began to understand the meaning of the scene, and he felt sure the name on the card was that of Mrs. Cahill.

A low spoken command from the trainer, and Emperor cautiously got down on his knees, keeping those small eyes on Phil Forrest all the time.

"Mrs. Cahill, Emperor has been commissioned by the Great Sparling Combined Shows to present a basket of flowers to you in the name of Mr. Sparling himself, and the show people, too. He has carried it all the way from the lot this morning," declared Mr. Kennedy.

The people on the street were now pressing closer, in order to see what was going to happen. Phil was smiling broadly, while Teddy was hugging himself with delight at Mrs. Cahill's nervousness.

"Emperor, give the flowers to the lady," commanded the trainer.

Slowly, the big elephant's trunk stretched out, extending the basket toward her inch by inch, while the widow instinctively shrank far back in her chair.

At last the trunk reached her.

"Take it," said Phil.

She grasped the basket with a muttered, "thank you."

"Say good-bye, Emperor," directed the trainer.

Emperor curled his trunk on high, coughed mightily, then rising on his hind legs until he stood almost as high as the widow's cottage, he uttered a wild, weird trumpeting that fairly shook the house.

Mrs. Cahill, in her fright, suddenly started back, her chair tipped over and she landed in a heap on the ground at the end of the porch.

CHAPTER IV. A FRIENDLY AUDIENCE

The afternoon performance had passed without a hitch. While there were many town people there the greater part of the audience, which nearly filled the big tent, was composed of visitors from the country.

Great applause greeted the performances of Phil Forrest and Teddy Tucker, but the two Circus Boys were saving their best efforts for the evening performance when all their friends would be present.

Mrs. Cahill, after her tumble, had been picked up by the lads who insisted that she shake the trunk of Emperor before he left the lawn. And now that she had seen the afternoon show, taking a motherly pride in the performance of her boys, as she proudly called them, the kindhearted woman sat down to a meal in the cook tent, which proved one of the most interesting experiences of her life.

As the hour for the evening performance approached there was an unusual bustle in the dressing tent. By this time the whole show had taken a keen interest in the affairs of the Circus Boys, who had been known to the performers—at least, to most of them—for the past two years.

Teddy had paid sundry mysterious visits to the horse tent, and held numerous confidential conversations with the equestrian director, all of which was supposed to have been unknown to Mr. Sparling, the owner of the show.

But, while Teddy was nursing his secret, Mr. Sparling also was keeping one of his own, one which was to be a great surprise to the two Circus Boys.

The first surprise was given when the clowns came out for their first entry. Lining up in front of the reserved seats, where the high school boys and girls sat, they sang a song in which they brought in the names of every member of Phil's class. This elicited roars of laughter from the spectators, while the school boys and girls waved their crimson and white class flags wildly.

The whole class was there as the guests of the management of the show. This was one of Mr. Sparling's surprises, but not the only one he was to give them that night.

Next came the leaping act, somersaulting from a springboard and in the end jumping over the herd of elephants. Teddy was so effectively disguised by his clown makeup that, for some time, the class did not recognize him. When finally they did, through some familiar gesture of his own, the boys and girls set up a perfect howl of delight in which the audience joined with enthusiastic applause, for Teddy, with all his clumsy ways, was one of the best tumblers in the show. He had developed marvelously since the close of the show the fall before.

Never had Teddy tumbled as he did that night. He took so many chances that Mr. Sparling, who was on the side lines, shouted a word of caution to him.

"You'll break your neck, if you're not careful."

In answer to the warning, Teddy took a long running start and did a double turn in the air, over the backs of the elephants, landing plump into the waiting arms of a bevy of painted clowns, the spectators evincing their appreciation by shouting out Teddy's name.

Teddy's chest swelled with pride as he waved his hand and shook his head as if to say: "Oh, that's nothing! You ought to see me when I'm really working."

The band played on and the show moved along with a merry medley of daring deeds and furious fun from the clowns.

At last, in response to the command of the ringmaster's whistle, the band ceased playing and silence fell over the tent as the ringmaster raised his hand for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said. "The next act will be a bareback riding feat unexcelled in any show in the world. In ring No. 1 the famous equestrienne, Little Dimples, will entertain you with her Desperate, Daring Dips of Death that defy imitation. In ring No. 2 you will recognize a fellow townsman—a townsboy, I should say. It will not be necessary for me to mention his name. Suffice it to say that, although he has been riding for less than a year, he has already risen to the enviable position of being one of the foremost bareback riders of the sawdust arena. I think that's all I have to say. Your friends will do the rest."

The ringmaster waved his hand to the band, which instantly blared forth and to its music Phil Forrest tripped lightly down the concourse, being obliged to go three-fourths of its length to get to the ring where he was to

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perform.

His journey led him right past the grandstand seats where his admiring school fellows were sitting, or rather standing. As a matter of fact, every one of them had risen to his feet by this time and was shouting out Phil's name.

As he drew nearer they began to chant, keeping time with his footsteps and the music of the band:

"Phil, Phil—Phillip F! Rah, rah! Siss—boom—ah!"

The Circus Boy grinned happily and waved his whip at them as he passed.

"I hope I won't make a fool of myself," he thought.

He had no intention of doing so. He had a few tricks that he was going to show his friends, and incidentally surprise Mr. Sparling himself, for Phil, who now owned his own ring horse, had been practicing in secret all winter on the act that he was going to attempt for the first time in public that evening.

Discarding his slippers and chalking the bottoms of his riding pumps, Phil began his act by riding standing on the rump of his mount, to get his equilibrium and his confidence at the same time.

Then the lad began throwing himself into his work, which increased in speed as the moments passed, until his supple, slender body was flashing here and there on the back of the handsome gray, causing the eyes of the spectators fairly to ache in their efforts to keep track of him.

The people voiced their excitement by yells of approval and howls of delight.

"My, but that boy can ride!" muttered Mr. Sparling, who had been watching the act critically. "In fact, I should like to know what he cannot do. If he had to do so, he could run this show fully as well as can I—and perhaps better at that," added the showman, with a grin.

Now the band struck up the music for the concluding number of the act.

"I wonder what he has up his sleeve," mused Mr. Sparling shrewdly, suspecting that Phil was about to try something he had never done in the ring before. "I hope he won't take any long chances, for I can't afford to have anything happen to my little star performer."

As a matter of fact both Phil and Teddy Tucker had become star performers, and were so featured on the circus bills, where their pictures had been placed for this, their third season out. The year before they had appeared on the small bills in the shop windows, but now they had the satisfaction of seeing themselves portrayed in life-size on the big boards.

Phil sent his ring horse forward at a lively gait, which grew faster and faster, as he sat lightly on the animal's rump, urging it along.

All at once he bounded to his feet, poised an instant, then threw himself into a succession of handsprings until he resembled a whirling pink and gold wheel.

This was a new act in the circus world, and such of the other performers as were under the big top at the moment paused to watch it.

No one was more surprised than Mr. Sparling himself. He knew what a difficult feat it was that the Circus Boy had not only essayed, but succeeded in doing. Phil kept it up at such length, and with such stubborn persistence, that the owner of the show feared lest the lad, in his dizziness might get a bad fall.

Doing a series of such rapid handsprings on the level ground is calculated to make a performer's head swim. But how much more difficult such an effort is on the slippery back of a moving horse may well be imagined.

Finally, red of face, panting, breathless, Phil Forrest alighted on his feet, well back on the ring horse's rump.

"Be ready to catch me," he gasped.

The ringmaster understood.

Phil urged his horse to a run about the sawdust arena.

"Now, what's that fool boy going to do?" wondered Mr. Sparling.

All at once Phil Forrest threw himself up into the air, his body doubling like a ball as he did so.

One—two—three times he whirled about in his marvelous backward somersault.

"Let go your tuck!" commanded the ringmaster, meaning that Phil was to release the grip of his hands which were holding his legs doubled close against his body.

The lad quickly straightened up, spreading his arms to steady himself in his descent. Fortunately he was dropping feet first, due to his instant obedience of the ringmaster's order.

Perhaps that alone saved the Circus Boy from breaking his neck, for so dizzy was he that he was unable to tell

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whether he was dropping feet or head first.

He lighted on his feet and the ringmaster caught him deftly.

"Stand steady a minute, till you get your bearings, Phil."

Phil needed that moment to steady himself, for the big top seemed to be whirling about on a pivot.

Now he began dimly to hear the thunders of applause that greeted his really wonderful performance.

"Can you stand alone now?"

"I think so," came the faint reply that was instantly drowned in the great uproar.

But the lad wavered a little after the ringmaster had released his grip. Steadying himself quickly, Phil pulled on his slippers and walked slowly from the ring, dizzy, but happy with the shouts of his school fellows ringing in his ears.

He heard the voice of Mr. Sparling close by him, saying:

"Great, great, my boy! Finest exhibition ever seen in a sawdust ring!"

Phil tripped proudly past the grandstand seats, where the boys were howling like a pack of wild Indians.

But just then something else occurred to attract their attention.

A donkey, long-eared, long-haired, dirty and unkempt trotted into the ring and spun about like a top for a full minute.

On the ludicrous-looking beast's back sat a boy in the makeup of a blackface clown. In his mouth was a harmonica, that he played lustily, as he sat facing to the rear with his back toward the donkey's head.

At that moment something else was observable. Instead of traveling head first, as any self-respecting donkey is supposed to do, this particular donkey was walking backwards. Yes, he was galloping backwards.

The instant the audience noted that, their cheers changed to howls of delight. The clown was Teddy Tucker, and the donkey was the surprise he had been storing up for this very occasion. While the audience laughed and jeered, Mr. Sparling looked on in surprise not unmixed with amazement. Here was the very thing he had been looking for, but had been unable thus far to find.

"It's a winner!" he cried, as Teddy Tucker and his strange mount ambled by him in a gait such as never had been seen in a sawdust arena before.

Right around the arena traveled boy and donkey. When opposite the grandstand seats, where the high school students were sitting, Teddy nearly drove them wild by drawing out the class colors which he had been hiding under his coat.

In a shrill, high-pitched voice he gave utterance to the high school class yell, which was instantly taken up by the class and eventually by the spectators themselves, until all seemed near the verge of hysterics.

Phil, instead of proceeding directly to the dressing tent, had waited by the bandstand to watch the new act of his companion, and he, with others of the performers, was laughing heartily as he leaned against the bandstand. Teddy knew he made a funny appearance, but just how ludicrous he could have little idea.

"Whose donkey is that?" demanded Mr. Sparling, hurrying up just as Phil and the other circus folks were congratulating the lad.

"He's mine," rejoined Teddy.

"Where did you get him?"

"I bought him. Think I stole him? Been training him all winter. Like him?"

"It's a great comedy act. He's engaged. Turn him over to the superintendent of ring stock and tell him to make a place on the train for the brute."

"I've already done so."

"Oh, you have, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Anybody would think you owned this show, the way you give orders around here."

"I'm willing, and so's the donkey," grinned Teddy.

"For what—to go on at every performance?"

"No; to own the show. We're going on right along, anyway. Gid-dap!"

"Hopeless!" muttered Sparling, shaking his head.

CHAPTER V. TAKEN BY SURPRISE

"Hurry up, Teddy!"

"What for?"

"Billy Ford is waiting for us out in the paddock."

"Oh, is that so? What does he want?"

"He's going to walk to the train with us, he says."

"That's good. I wonder if any of the other fellows will be along?"

"No; I think not. I asked him if he were alone, and he said he was."

"We might give him a feed in the accommodation car," suggested Teddy.

"No; you and I are going to bed right quick after we get back to the train. I, for one, am tired after this strenuous day."

"It has been lively, hasn't it?"

"It has," answered Phil, laying special emphasis on the "has."

"Say, young man, where did you get that freak donkey?" demanded Mr. Miaco, the head clown, approaching at that moment.

"Drew him in a prize package of chewing gum," called one of the performers.

"Where did you get him, anyway?" called another.

"You seem to know all about it, so what's the use of my telling you?" retorted Teddy.

The lads had finished their work for the day, and nothing now remained to be done except to disrobe, take a quick scrub down after their severe exercise, don their clothes and take their time in getting to the train.

There was plenty of time for this, as their sleeper being on the third and last section of the circus train, they would not leave for nearly two hours yet, at the earliest.

The baths of the Circus Boys were more severe than pleasant, and in taking them each one had to perform a service for the other. The bath consisted of the performer's standing still while his companion emptied several buckets of cold water over him, following it with a liberal smearing of soap and then some more pailfuls of water.

Once a week, over Sunday, the performers were allowed to sleep at hotels, providing the circus did not have an all day run. At such times they were able to enjoy the luxury of a hot bath, but at other times it was cold water—sometimes colder and more chilling than at others. Yet, they thrived under it, growing strong and healthy.

Having once more gotten into their street clothes, refreshed and rested to a degree that would be scarcely believed after their severe exercise, both lads repaired to the paddock, where they found the president of the high school class waiting for them, interestedly watching the scene of life and color always observable in the circus paddock, a canvas walled enclosure where performers and ring stock await the call to enter the ring.

"Here we are, Billy," greeted Phil.

"Oh, so quick?" Billy started guiltily.

"That's the way we always do things," answered Teddy. "Have to do things on the jump, we circus men do."

"So I see. What are you going to do now?"

"Going to the car, of course. We always go right to the sleeper after the show. Why?"

"Oh, nothing special. I thought maybe you might like to go downtown and visit with the boys for a while."

"I should like to do so very much, but I do not think it will be best. We make it a rule to go straight home, as we call our car, and I've never broken over that rule yet, Billy."

"Very well, Phil; then I will walk along with you. I guess you know the way."

"That's more than I do every night," laughed Phil. "It's a case of getting lost 'most every night, especially in the big towns, for the cars seldom are found at night where we left them in the morning."

"I shouldn't like that," objected Billy.

"We don't. But we can't help ourselves."

"Here, where you going?" demanded Teddy suddenly.

"Taking the path across the lot here. It is much shorter," replied Billy.

"Oh, all right. I had forgotten about the path."

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"I should think you would—"

Phil got no further in his remark. He was interrupted by President Billy, crying loudly:

"Here we are!"

Instantly fifteen or twenty shadowy forms sprang up from the grass and hurled themselves upon the Circus Boys.

Taken by surprise as they were, Phil and Teddy gave a good account of themselves. Shadow after shadow went down under a good stiff punch, for it must be remembered that both boys were able to make a handsome living because of the possession of well trained muscles.

Yet no two men could have stood up for long under the onslaught, and Phil and Teddy very soon went down with their assailants piling on top of them.

Up to this point not a word had been spoken, nor did either of the lads have time to speculate as to who their enemies might be.

"Here, you fellow, get off my neck!" howled Teddy. "Let me get up and I'll clean up the whole bunch of you two at a time, if you'll give me half a chance."

No reply was made to this.

"Get the blankets!" commanded a deep voice.

A moment later the two lads were quickly wound in the folds of a pair of large horse blankets. They were then picked up, none too gently and borne off to the other side of the field, kicking and squirming in their efforts to escape.

Their captors, however, did not for an instant relax their hold, and further struggle proved vain.

Reaching the other side of the field, the Circus Boys were dumped into a wagon. This they knew because they heard the driver give the directions regarding letting down the tail board.

Placing their burdens on the wagon floor, the captors very coolly sat down on the boys. Then the wagon started. Never in the old days of the road show, when Phil and Teddy were riding and sleeping in a springless canvas wagon, had they experienced a rougher ride. It seemed as if every stone in the county had been placed in the path of the rickety old wagon in which they were being spirited away.

About this time Phil Forrest began to wonder. He could not understand the meaning of the attack. And what had become of President Billy? He knew Teddy was lying beside him, but Billy must have made his escape. If so Billy would give the alarm, and the show people would quickly overtake the kidnappers.

No such interruption occurred, however, rather greatly to Phil's surprise, so he lay still and waited for a favorable moment when he might take a hand in the affair himself.

Teddy's voice could be heard under his blanket, in muffled, angry protestations, his feet now and then beating a tattoo on the wagon bottom. Such an act brought down the weight of his captors upon the offending feet each time.

Once Teddy managed to work the covering from his mouth for one brief instant.

"Hey, Rube!" he howled lustily, this being the signal known to circus men the world over, when one or more of them is in trouble.

But there were no strong-armed circus men to come to their rescue. All the circus laborers were working off on the lot striking the tents and loading the show on the wagons. Teddy was given no further opportunity to protest.

After a journey of what seemed hours, and during which, Phil Forrest had lost all sense of direction, the wagon came to a halt.

He could hear the hum of conversation as his captors consulted in low tones. Then all at once he found himself jerked from the wagon and plumped down on the ground.

Teddy went through a similar experience, excepting that his fall was considerably more severe. Teddy struck the ground with a jolt that made him utter a loud "Wow!"

He was on his feet in a twinkling, only to find himself pounced upon and borne heavily to earth again.

Fuming and threatening, Teddy was roughly picked up, Phil being served likewise.

The boys felt themselves being borne up a short flight of steps and down a long hall. Then came more steps. This time it was a long flight of stairs, the kidnappers getting their burdens up this with evident effort.

"I hope they don't drop me, now," thought Phil. "I shall surely roll all the way to the bottom, though it might

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enable me to get away."

Finally an upper floor was reached. The captors bore their burdens in and placed them on the floor. The Circus Boys realized, at the same instant, that the vigilance of the kidnappers had been relaxed for the second.

Throwing the blankets off Phil and Teddy leaped to their feet ready for flight. As they did so they met with the surprise of their lives.

CHAPTER VI. IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

Teddy had squared off, and was landing sledge-hammer blows on the empty air.

Phil, too, had squared himself prepared to give battle, but his hands fell sharply to his sides.

"Wha—what—" he gasped.

"Come on!" bellowed Teddy.

They were in a large room, brilliantly lighted, and about them, in a semi-circle, was a line of laughing faces. From them the eyes of the astonished Circus Boys wandered to a long table on which were flowers and plenty of good things to eat.

"Why, it's our old recitation room in the high school, Teddy," breathed Phil.

"I don't care what it is. I can lick the whole outfit!" shouted Teddy Tucker advancing belligerently.

"It's the boys, Teddy, don't you understand?" laughed Phil. "Well, of all the ways of inviting a fellow to dinner, this beats anything I ever saw before."

"How does it feel to be kidnaped?" grinned President Billy, extending his hand.

"So you are the young gentleman who put up this job on us, are you?" demanded Phil.

"I guess I am one of them. But I wasn't unlucky enough to get a black eye, like Walter over there. You gave that to him, Teddy. My, what a punch you have!" laughed Billy.

"That isn't a circumstance to what's coming to you. I'll wait till I get back to school, next fall, and then I'll take it out of you. You'll have something coming to you all summer. Did I paint Walt's eye that way?"

"You did. It's up to you to apologize to him now."

"Apologize?"

"Yes; that's what I said."

"I like that! I have a good notion to apologize by painting the other eye the same color," growled Teddy.

"But, what does all this mean?" urged Phil, looking about him, still a bit dazed.

"It means that we fellows wanted to give you and Teddy a little supper. It isn't much, but there are sandwiches and cookies and pie and lots of other stuff that you'll like."

"Cookies?" interrupted Teddy, his face relaxing into a half smile.

"Yes."

"We knew you wouldn't come, so we planned to kidnap you both and bring you over here by main force. After we eat supper we'll have a little entertainment among ourselves. Walter is going to sing—"

"What's that? Walt going to sing?" demanded Teddy, halting on his way to inspect the table.

"Yes."

"Then I'm going, right now!" answered the lad, turning sharply and heading for the door.

"Why, why—"

"I've heard him sing before. Good night!"

"Come back here," laughed Phil, grabbing his companion by the shoulder. "We can stand even Walter's singing if he can. But really, fellows, we can't stay more than fifteen or twenty minutes."

"Why not?"

"Because we must get to the train. Were we to be left we might come in for a fine. Mr. Sparling is very strict. He expects everybody to live up to the rules. I'm sorry, but—"

"It's all fixed, Phil. No need to worry," President Billy informed him.

"Fixed? What do you mean?"

"With Mr. Sparling."

"You—you told him?"

"Yes."

"See here, Billy Ford," interrupted Teddy.

"What is it, Teddy?"

"Did you say Boss Sparling was in on this little kidnaping game— did he know you were going to raise roughhouse with—with us?"

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"I—I guess he did," admitted President Billy.

"I'll settle with him tomorrow," nodded Teddy, swelling out his chest.

"Did you tell him you were going to have a supper up here?" asked Phil.

"He knows all about it. You need not worry about the train going away without you. Mr. Sparling said you had a short run tonight, and that the last section would not pull out until three o'clock in the morning. That's honest Injun, Phil."

"Well, if that is the case, then we'll stay."

"Hurrah for the Circus Boys!" shouted the class, making a rush for seats at the table.

"Ready for the coffee," announced the President.

Who should come in at that moment, with a steaming coffeepot, but the Widow Cahill.

"Are you in this, too?" Teddy demanded.

"I am afraid I am," laughed Mrs. Cahill. "The boys needed some grown-ups to help them out."

"You're no friend of mine, then. I'll—"

"But you are going to have some of those molasses cookies that I told you I baked for you—"

"Cookies? Where?" exclaimed Teddy, forgetting his anger instantly.

"Help yourself. There they are."

"It isn't much of a spread," apologized the president. "We have a little of everything and not much of anything—"

"And a good deal of nothing," added Teddy humorously.

"Everybody eat!" ordered Mrs. Cahill.

They did. Thirty boys with boys' appetites made the home-cooked spread disappear with marvelous quickness. Each had brought something from home, and Mrs. Cahill, whom they had taken into their confidence two days before the Sparling Shows reached town, had furnished the rest. Everything was cold except the coffee, but the feasters gave no thought to that. It was food, and good wholesome food at that, and the lads were doing full justice to it.

"Say, Phil, that was a wonderful act of yours," nodded President Billy, while the admiring gaze of the class was fixed on Phil Forrest.

"I wish I might learn to do that," said Walter.

"You? You couldn't ride a wooden rocking horse without falling off and getting a black eye," jeered Teddy, at which there was a shout of laughter.

"Can you?" cut in Phil.

"I can ride anything from a giraffe to a kangaroo—that is, until I fall off," Teddy added in a lower voice. "I rode a greased pig at a country fair once. Anybody who can do that, can sit on a giraffe's neck without slipping off."

"Where was that?" questioned a voice. "I never heard of your riding a greased pig around these parts."

"I guess that must have been before you were born," retorted Teddy witheringly.

"Say, Phil," persisted Walter, this time in a confidential tone.

"Yes?"

"Do you suppose you could get me a job in the circus?"

"I don't know about that, Walt. What do you think you could do?"

"Well, I can do a cartwheel and—"

"Oh, fudge!" interrupted Teddy.

"That's more than Tucker could do when he joined the show. Do you know what he did, first of all?" said Phil.

"No; what did he do?" chorused the boys.

"He poured coffee in the cook tent for the thirsty roustabouts. That's the way he began his circus career."

"I didn't do it more than a day or two," Tucker explained, rather lamely.

"But you did it!" jeered Walter.

"Then his next achievement was riding the educated mule. I guess you boys never saw him do that."

"Not until tonight."

"This is different. The other was a bucking mule, and Teddy made a hit from the first time he entered the ring on Jumbo. He hit pretty much everything in the show, including the owner himself." Phil leaned back and laughed

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heartily at the memory of his companion's exhibition at this, his first appearance in a circus ring as a performer.

"No, Walt, I wouldn't advise you to join. Some people are cut out for the circus life. They never would succeed at anything else. Teddy and myself for instance. Besides, your people never would consent to it. You will be a lawyer, or something great, some of these days, while we shall be cutting up capers in the circus ring at so much per caper. It's a wonderful life but you keep out of it," was Phil Forrest's somewhat illogical advice.

"How far are you going this year?" asked one of the boys.

"I can't say. I understand we are going south—to Dixie Land for the last half of the season. I think we are headed for Canada, just now, swinging around the circuit as it were. Isn't it about time we were getting back to the train, Teddy?"

"No, I guess not. I haven't eaten up all the cookies yet. Please pass the cookies, you fellow up there at the head of the table."

"We shall have our little entertainment before you fellows go to your sleeper. We reckon Phil Forrest and Teddy Tucker ought to do some stunts for us. Isn't that so?" asked President Billy.

"Yes," shouted the boys.

"What, after a meal like that? I couldn't think of it," laughed Phil. "Never perform on a full stomach unless you want to take chances. It might do you up for good."

"Well, it won't hurt Teddy to be funny. Do something funny, Teddy."

Teddy looked up soulfully as he munched a cookie.

"Costs money to see me act funny," he said.

"Go on; go on!" urged the boys. "You never showed us any of your tricks except what you did in the ring this evening."

"Do you know, it's a funny thing, but I never can be funny unless there is a crop of new-mown sawdust under my feet," remarked Teddy.

"Nothing very funny about that!" growled a voice at the further end of the table.

Teddy fixed him with a reproving eye.

"Very well, but you'll be sorry. I will now present to you the giddiest, gladdest, gayest, grandest, gyrating, glamorous and glittering galaxy—as the press agent says—that ever happened."

Teddy, who sat at the extreme end of the table, placed both hands carelessly on the table, then drew his body up by slow degrees, until a moment later as his body seemed to unfold, he was doing a hand stand right on the end of the supper table.

The boys shouted with delight and Teddy kicked his feet in the air.

"Go on! Don't stop," urged the lads.

"You'll be wishing I had stopped before I began," retorted the lad, starting to walk on his hands right down the center of the table.

There were dishes in the way, but this did not disturb Tucker in the least. He merely pushed them aside, some rolling off on the floor and breaking, others falling into the laps of the boys.

"Here, here, what are you doing?" called Phil.

"This is what I call the topsy-turvy walk."

Teddy paused when halfway down the table, to let his mouth down to the table, where he had espied another cookie. When he pulled himself up, the cookie was between his lips, and the boys roared at the ludicrous sight.

Then, the lad who was walking on his hands, continued right on. He was nearing the foot of the table when something occurred that changed the current of their thoughts, sending the heart of every boy pounding in his throat.

Crash!

It seemed as if the roof had been suddenly hurled down upon their heads.

Teddy instantly fell off the table, tumbling into the laps of two of the boys, the three going down to the floor in a heap, finally rolling under the table. The other boys sprang to their feet in sudden alarm.

"It's a band," cried Phil. "Don't be afraid."

Then the circus band, that had been waiting in the hall just outside the dining place, marched in with horns blaring, drums beating, and took up their position at the far end of the room.

"It's the circus band," cried the lads, now recovering from their fright. "How did they get here?"

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By this time Teddy, his face red and resentful, was poking his head from beneath the table.

"Hey, Rube!" he shouted, then ducked back again.

Phil understood instantly that this was one of Mr. Sparling's surprises. But there were still other surprises to come. No sooner had the band taken up its position than there was again a commotion out in the hall. The lads opened their eyes wide when a troop of painted clowns came trotting in, followed by half a dozen acrobats, all in ring costume. A mat was quickly spread by some attendants that Mr. Sparling had sent.

Then began the merriest hodge-podge of acrobatic nonsense that the high school boys ever had seen. The clowns, entering into the spirit of the moment, grew wonderfully funny. They sang songs and told stories, while the acrobats hurled themselves into a mad whirl of somersaults, cartwheels and Wild Dervish throws.

Thus far the boys were too amazed to speak.

All at once some of the performers began to form a pyramid, one standing on the other's shoulders.

"Here, I'm going to be the top-mounter!" cried Teddy, taking a running start and beginning to clamber up the human column. He was assisted up and up until he was standing at the top, his head almost touching the high ceiling in the room.

"Speech!" howled the delighted high school boys.

"Fellow citizens," began Teddy.

Just then the human pyramid toppled over and Teddy had to leap to save himself, striking the mat, doing a rolling tumble and coming up on his feet.

When all the fun making in the hall was over one surprise proved yet to be in the reserve. The high school boys of Edmeston turned out with lighted torches. Forming in column of fours they escorted Phil and Teddy to their car on the circus train. It was not many minutes later that the boys, tired out but happy, tumbled into their berths, where they were asleep immediately, carrying on, even in their dreams, the joyous scenes through which they had just passed.

CHAPTER VII. SHIVERS AND HIS SHADOW

Half a hundred motley fools came trooping into the sawdust arena, their voices raised in song and shout.

Mud clown, character clown, harlequin, fat boy, jester, funny rustic, vied with each other in mirth-provoking antics so aptly described by the circus press agent as a "merry-hodgepodge of fun-provoking, acrobatic idiosyncrasies of an amazing character."

And so they were.

Children screamed with delight, while their elders smiled a dignified approval of the grotesque, painted throng that trooped gayly down the uneven course.

The music of the circus band stopped short. Then came a fanfare of trumpets, and far down the line from behind the crimson curtains near to the bandstand, a dignified figure all in white, emerged and tripped along the grassy way, halting now and then to gaze fixedly at some imaginary object just above the heads of those on the upper row of seats, the very drollery of which gaze was irresistible.

Shivers, Prince of Clowns, the greatest fun maker and character clown of all that mad, painted throng, had made his entry.

Shivers had joined out with the Sparling show for the first time that season. He was known as the leading clown in the business. >From the first, Shivers had taken a liking to Teddy Tucker, and shortly after leaving Edmeston he had conceived the idea of making a full-fledged clown of Teddy. The permission of the manager had been obtained and this was Teddy's first appearance as assistant to Shivers. Teddy was considerably smaller, of course, and made up as the exact counterpart of Shivers trailing along after him like a shadow, the lad made a most amusing appearance. Every move that the clown made, Teddy mimicked as the two minced along down the concourse.

Shivers was a shining model of the clown both in method and makeup. His stiffly starched bulging trousers disappeared under the stiff ruffles of a three-quarter waist. A broad turnover collar of the nurse style was set off with a large bow of bright red ribbon, and a baker's cap, perched jauntily on one side of the head, completed his merry makeup. This too describes Teddy Tucker's outfit.

"Now, be funny!" directed Shivers.

"I can't help but be if I act like you," retorted Teddy, whereat the clown grinned.

Pausing before the dollar seats the clown pulled out the ruffles of his snow-white waist, poising with crossed legs on one toe. Teddy did the same, and a great roar was the reward of their drollery.

"La, la! La, la, la!" hummed the clown, stumbling over a rope to the keen delight of those in the reserved seats—the same rope, by the way, that he had been falling over twice each day for the past month. Then he blew a kiss to a fragile slip of a girl who was perched on a trapeze bar far up toward the dome of the great tent.

Zoraya, for that was her name, smiled down, gracefully swung off into space, soaring lightly into the strong, sure arms of her working mate.

Just the suspicion of an approving smile lighted up the face of the clown for the moment, for he dearly loved this little motherless daughter of his, who had been his care since she was a child.

Shivers had taught her all she knew, and Zoraya was the acknowledged queen of the lofty tumblers.

But the clown half unconsciously caught his breath as the lithe form of Zoraya shot over the trapeze bar, described a graceful "two-and-a-half" in the air, and, shooting downward, hit the net with a resounding smack that caused the spectators to catch their breath sharply.

The clown shook a warning head at her, and Teddy so far forgot himself as to stub his toe and measure his length upon the ground.

"Don't do it, Bright Eyes!" cautioned Shivers, shaking his head warningly at the girl, as the child bounced up from the impact, kicking her little feet together and turning a somersault on the swaying net. "It isn't in your contract. Folks sometimes break their necks trying kinkers that's not in the writings."

Her answer was a merry, mocking laugh, and Zoraya ran lightly up a rope ladder to the platform where she balanced easily for another flight.

"My, I wish I could do stunts like that!" breathed Teddy.

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"Just like a bird. La, la, la! La, la, la!" sang the painted clown, turning a handspring and pivoting on his head for a grand, spectacular finish.

His refined comedy, so pleasing to the occupants of the reserved seats, had now been changed to loud, uproarious buffoonery as he bowed before the blue, fifty cent seats where his auditors were massed on boards reaching from the top of the side wall clear down to the edge of the arena.

He took liberties with their hats, passed familiar criticisms on their families and told them all about the other performers in the ring, arousing the noisy appreciation of the spectators.

Teddy was put to his wits end to keep up with this rapid-fire clowning, and the perspiration was already streaking the powder on his face.

All at once, above the din and the applause, the ears of the clown caught a sound different from the others—a scream of alarm. Shivers had heard such a cry many times before during his twenty years in the sawdust ring, and, as he expressed it, the sound always gave him "crinkles up and down his spine."

There was no need to start and look about for the cause. He understood that there had been an accident. But the clown looked straight ahead and went on with his work. He knew, by the strains of the music, exactly what Zoraya should be doing at the moment when the cry came—that her supple body was flashing through the air in a "passing leap," one of the feats that always drew such great applause, even if it were more spectacular than dangerous.

"No, it can't be Zoraya!" he muttered. But the clown cast one nervous, hesitating glance up there where her troupe was working in the air. The cold sweat stood out upon him. Zoraya was not with them. His eyes sought the net. It was empty. He saw a figure clad in pink, white and gold shooting right through the net.

Then, too, he saw something else. A slender, pink-clad figure was darting under the net with outstretched arms.

"It's Phil. He's going to catch her," shouted Teddy jubilantly.

But Phil went down under the impact of the heavy blow as Zoraya struck him. A throng of ring attendants gathered about them, and in a moment the two forms were picked up and borne quickly from the ring.

Once, years before, Shivers had been through an earthquake in South America, when things about him were topsy-turvy, when the circus tent came tumbling down about him, and ring curbs went up into the air in most bewildering fashion.

Now, that same sensation was upon him again, and quarter poles seemed to dance before his eyes like giddy marionettes, while the long rows of blue seats appeared to be tilted up at a dangerous angle. Then slowly the clown's bewilderment merged into keen understanding, but his painted face reflected none of the anguish that was gripping at his heart strings.

Teddy brushed a hand across his own eyes.

"I—I guess they're both killed," he said falteringly.

Just then the voice of the head clown broke out in the old Netherlands harvest song:

"Yanker didel doodle down,
Didel, dudel lanter,
Yankee viver, voover vown,
Botermilk und tanther."

"Poor Zoraya!" muttered the clown under cover of the applause that greeted his vocal effort. And his associates looked down from their perches high in the air, gazing in wonder upon the clown who was bowing so low that, each time he did so, he was obliged to turn a somersault to gain his equilibrium.

"Dangerously hurt—went through the net head first. Hurry!" panted a belated clown, running by to his station. "Boy hurt, too."

"Told you so!" grumbled Teddy.

But Shivers did not flinch, and, as he neared the reserved seats on the grandstand, his voice again rang out, this time in a variation of the ancient harvest song:

"Yankee doodle, keep it up,
Yankee doodle, dandy;
Mind the music and the step,
And with your feet be handy."

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Never had the show people seen Shivers so uproariously funny. Under the spell of his merriment, the audience quickly forgot the tragic scene that they had just witnessed.

Teddy, however, noticed little dark trenches that had ploughed their courses down through the makeup of the clown's cheeks from his eyes. Teddy knew that tears had caused those furrows.

As Shivers looked down the long, grassy stretch ahead of him, that he still must cover before his act would be finished, the goal seemed far away. He flashed one longing glance toward the crimson curtains that shut off the view of the paddock and the dressing tents, vaguely wondering what lay beyond for him and for little Zoraya. Then Shivers set his jaws hard, plunging into a mad whirl of handsprings and somersaults, each of which sent him nearer to the end of that seemingly endless way.

"Here, here, what are you trying to do?" gasped Tucker, unable to keep up with the clown's rapid progress by doing the same things. Teddy solved the problem by running. He could keep up in no other way.

At last Shivers reached the end. With a mighty leap he sprang for the paddock and the dressing tent. And how he did run! Such sprinting never had been seen in the big show, even between man and horse in the act following the Roman chariot races.

Once a rope caught Shivers' toes. He fell forward, but cleverly landed on his shoulders and the back of his neck, bouncing up like a rubber man and plunging on.

Shivers had darted through the crimson curtain by the time Teddy Tucker had succeeded in picking himself up from having fallen over the same rope.

Stretched out on a piece of canvas in the dressing tent, her head slightly elevated on a saddle pad, they found Zoraya, her pallor showing even through the roughly laid on makeup.

Phil was sitting on a trunk holding his head in his hands, for he had received quite a severe shock.

"If she regains consciousness soon she may live," announced the surgeon. "If not—"

"No, no!" protested the white-faced clown, dropping on his knees by the side of the child, folding Zoraya tenderly in his arms. "She must not die! She cannot die!"

His jaunty baker's cap tilted off and fell upon her tinselled breast, while groups of curious, sorrowful painted faces pressed about them in silent sympathy.

Teddy crushed his white cap between his hands twisting it nervously.

"She isn't hurt. Can't you see? Look, she is smiling now," pleaded the clown.

The surgeon shook his head sadly, and Shivers buried his head on Zoraya's shoulder, pressing his painted cheek close to hers, while the dull roar of the circus, off under the big top, drifted to them faintly, like the sighing of a distant cataract.

An impressive silence hovered over the scene, which was broken, at last, by the quiet voice of the circus surgeon.

"The child is coming back, Shivers. She has fought it out, but she will perform no more, I am afraid, for bones broken as are hers never will be quite the same again."

"She don't have to perform any more, sir," snapped the clown. "I'll do that for her. You put that down in your fool's cap and smoke it. Yes, sir, I'll—"

"Daddy!" murmured the lips that were pressed close to Shivers' ear.

It was scarcely a whisper, more a breath that Shivers caught, but faint as it was, it sent the blood pounding to his temples until they showed red, like blotches of rouge under powder.

"D-a-d-d-y-y-o-u-r—Zory got an awful—b-u-m-p."

Three harlequins who had been poising each on one knee, chins in hands, gazing down into the face of the little performer, suddenly threw backward somersaults in their joy.

"Yes, Phil's quickness saved you," spoke up the surgeon. "Had it not been for him you would be dead now."

Teddy Tucker, the tears streaming down his cheeks, was hopping about on one foot, vigorously kicking a shin with the other foot, trying to punish himself for his tears.

"I'm a fool! I'm a fool! But—but—I can't help it," he sobbed, wheeling suddenly and dashing into his own dressing tent.

"Call for Shivers!" bellowed the voice of the callboy, thrusting his head inside the entrance flap. "All the Joeyes out for the round off!"

"Coming!"

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Shivers gently laid the broken form of Zoraya back, pressed a hurried kiss on her painted lips and bounded away to take his cue, the circus band out there by the crimson curtains swinging brazenly into the enlivening strains of "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight!"

CHAPTER VIII. A RIVAL IN THE FIELD

Zoraya was left behind. She was sent to a hospital where she was destined to remain many weeks, before she would be able to be moved to her little home in Indiana. She never performed again.

In the meantime the Great Sparling Combined Shows had moved majestically along. They had left the United States and were touring Canada, playing in many of the quaint little French villages and larger towns, where the Circus Boys found much to interest and amuse them.

Teddy and Shivers had made a great hit in their "brother" clown act, which was daily added to and improved upon as the show worked its way along the Canadian border.

One day Phil, who had been downtown after the parade, where he went to read the papers when he got a chance, came back and sought out Mr. Sparling in the latter's private tent.

"Well, Phil," greeted the owner cordially, "what's on your mind?"

"Perhaps a good deal, but possibly nothing of any consequence. You will have to decide that."

"What is it?" questioned Mr. Sparling sharply.

"Do we show in Corinto?"

"Yes; why?"

"I thought I had heard you mention that we were to do so."

"Why do you ask that question?"

"I'll answer it by asking another," smiled the Circus Boy. "When do we make that stand?"

The showman consulted his route book.

"A week from next Tuesday," he said. "Anything wrong about that?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Nothing except that there is another show billed to play there the day before."

"What?"

Mr. Sparling bent a keen gaze on Phil's face, to make sure the lad was not joking.

"Yes, the Sully Hippodrome Circus is billed there for Monday."

"Where did you find that out?"

"I read it in a St. Catharines' paper down at the hotel this morning. I thought you would be interested in knowing of it."

"Interested? Why, boy, it will kill our business. So Sully is cutting in on us, is he? I thought he was playing the eastern circuit. He threatened to get even with me."

"Even?"

"Yes. Sully was once a partner in this show, but he proved himself so dishonest that I had to take legal measures to get him out. He got money from some source last season, and put a show of his own on the road. He has a twenty-five car show, I understand. Not such a small outfit at that. But I hear it is a graft show."

"What's a graft show? I must confess that I never heard of that before."

"A graft show, my boy, is a show that gets money in various ways. They frequently carry a gang of thieves and confidence men with them, who work among the spectators on the grounds before the show, robbing them and getting a commission on their earnings."

"Is it possible that there are such dishonest people in the show business?" marveled the lad.

"Not only possible, but an actual fact. I am happy to say, however, that there are few shows that will tolerate anything of that sort."

"I'm glad I did not have the misfortune to get with one of them," smiled Phil. "Are any of the big shows graft shows?"

"None of them. But about this heading us off?"

"Yes; what will you do about it?"

"We'll be there on Monday, too," decided the showman after a moment's reflection.

"On Monday?"

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"Yes."

"Then—then you intend to skip a date somewhere?"

"We shall have to."

Mr. Sparling was a man of resource and quick action. He made up his mind in a minute as to what course to follow.

"I'm going to detach you from the show for a few days, if you don't mind, Phil," decided Mr. Sparling.

"I am glad to serve you in any way that you think I can," answered the lad with a flash of surprise in his glance.

"I know that. What I want you to do is to join that show right away."

"Join them?"

"I do not mean that exactly. I want you to go to the town where they are playing tomorrow, I will get the name of the town before the day is over. Follow the show right along from town to town until next Monday, paying your way when you go in and keeping your eyes open for their game. You, with your shrewdness, ought to have no difficulty in getting sufficient evidence to help me carry out my plans."

"What sort of evidence do you wish me to get?"

"Make a mental note of everything you see that is not regular, and if they have a route card get a copy of that. It's perfectly regular, young man," hastened the showman, noting Phil's look of disapproval. "You are not doing anything improper. I do not ask you to pry into their private affairs. We have a right, however, to find out if we can, what their plans are with relation to ourselves. If they are playing Corinto the day before we do, just by mere chance, then I shall make no further objections, but if they are planning to move along ahead of us and kill our business—well, that's a different matter."

"I see," nodded Phil. "Who will take my place in the ring work here?"

"We will get along without it, that's all. It doesn't matter so much in these small towns. I don't care if you do not join out until we get to Niagara Falls. We'll be playing in the real country then."

"And working south?"

"Yes. As soon as the weather gets cooler we will head for the south and stay there until the close of the season. They are going to have a big cotton crop in the south this fall, and there will be lots of money lying around loose to be picked up by a show like ours."

"When do you want me to start?" asked Phil.

"Just as soon as I can get an answer to a telegram that I'm going to send now. You will be off sometime this afternoon. But perhaps you can go on in your acts—no, I guess you had better not. You'll be missed at night if you do."

"Yes; that's so."

"I shall have some further directions for you. So long, for the present."

Phil turned away thoughtfully. Shortly after the afternoon performance Mr. Sparling sent for Phil again, the lad having in the meantime packed a few necessary articles in his bag preparatory to the journey that lay before him.

"The other show will be at St. Catharines tomorrow. Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir. What time can I get away?"

"Five o'clock. You will be there in the morning in time to see them set the tents. Let me warn you that Sully is ugly and unscrupulous. If he were to know what you are there for it might get you into a mix-up, so be careful."

"I'll be careful. Have you any further instructions?"

"I want to give you some money. You can't travel without money."

"I have plenty," answered Phil. "I will keep my expense account and turn it in to you when I get back. Where do you wish me to join you?"

"Corinto, unless you think best to come back in the meantime. That is, if you get sufficient information. You know what I want without my going into details, don't you?"

"I think so."

"Now, look out for yourself."

"I'll try to."

"You have not mentioned to anyone what you are going to do, of course?"

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"Certainly not. Not even to Teddy. Perhaps if you will, you might make the explanation to him," suggested Phil.

"Yes; I'll do that as soon as you have gotten away. He'll be raising the roof off the big top when he misses you."

Phil extended his hand to his employer, then turned and hurried from the tent. First, the boy proceeded to the sleeping car in which he berthed, for his bag. Securing this he had just time to reach the station before the five o'clock train rumbled in.

The lad boarded a sleeping car and settled himself for the long ride before him, passing the time by reading the current magazines with which he provided himself when the train agent came through. Late in the evening the lad turned in. Riding in a sleeping car was no novelty to him, and he dropped asleep almost instantly, not to awaken again until the porter shook him gently by the shoulder.

"What is it?" questioned Phil, starting up.

"St. Catharines."

The lad pulled the curtains of his berth aside. Day was just breaking as he peered out.

"There they are," he muttered, catching sight of a switch full of gaudily painted cars bearing the name of the Sully Hippodrome Circus. "They have just got in," he decided from certain familiar signs of which he took quick mental note. "Looks like a cheap outfit at that. But you never can tell."

Phil Forrest dressed himself quickly and grasping his bag hurried from the car, anxious to be at his task, which, to tell the truth, he approached with keen zest. He was beginning to enter into the spirit of the work to which he had been assigned, and which was to provide him with much more excitement than he at that moment dreamed.

CHAPTER IX. PHIL MAKES A DISCOVERY

"I guess I'll leave my bag in the station and go over to the lot," decided the lad.

"The stake and chain gang will just about be on the job by this time."

It is a well known fact in the circus world that there is no better place to get information than from the stake and chain gang, the men who hurry to the lot the moment their train gets in and survey it, driving stakes to show where the tents are to be pitched, and it is a familiar answer, when one is unable to answer a question to say: "Ask the stake and chain gang."

That was exactly what Phil Forrest had in mind to do.

He followed a show wagon to the circus lot, where he found the men already at work measuring off the ground with their surveyor's chains, in the faint morning light.

"Morning," smiled Phil, sauntering over to where he observed the foreman watching the work of his men.

"Morning," growled the showman. Phil knew he would growl because the fellow had not yet had his breakfast.

"Seems to me the circuses are coming this way pretty fast?" suggested the lad.

"What d'ye mean?"

"I hear that there are to be two over in Corinto within two days—yours and—and. What's the name of the other one?"

"Sparling's," grunted the foreman.

Phil grinned appreciatively. He had drawn his man out on the first round.

"That's it. That's the name. I shouldn't think he'd want to show in the same place the day after you had been there?"

"Why not?"

"'Cause the folks will all spend their money going to your show."

The foreman threw back his head and laughed.

"That's exactly what they will do, kid. That's what we want them to do. We'll make that Sparling outfit get off the earth before we get through with them. The boss has his axe out for that outfit."

"Indeed?" cooed Phil.

"Yes. He's going, between you and me, to keep a day ahead of them all the way over this circuit."

"Smart, very smart," laughed Phil, slapping his thigh as if he appreciated the joke fully. "Have an orange. I always carry some about with me when I'm going to visit a circus."

"Thanks, that will taste good at this time of the morning. It will keep me going until the cook tent is ready. The cook tent is where we get our meals, you understand. 'Course you don't know about those things."

"No indeed!"

"Outsiders never do," replied the man.

"I was wondering something a moment ago, when you told me about getting ahead of the other fellow."

"Wondering?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Wondering how you know where the other fellow is going?"

"That's a dark secret, kid," answered the stake and chain foreman, with a very knowing wink.

"But if you know where he is going he must know where you are billed for at the same time," urged Phil.

"He don't."

"But why not?"

"In the first place we bill ourselves only a few days ahead. And, in the second, we have a way of finding out where Sparling is going for the next month or so ahead. Sometimes further than that."

"Well, well, that's interesting—" The foreman hurried off to give some directions to his men, slowly returning a few minutes later.

"I should like to know how you do it?"

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"Say kid, there's tricks in the show business just the same as in any other. Mebby there's somebody with the Sparling outfit who keeps us posted. Mind you, I ain't saying there is; but that there might be."

"Oh, I see," muttered Phil, suddenly enlightened. "Then someone in the other show is giving away his employer's secrets. Fine for you, but pretty rough on the other fellow."

"Let the other fellow take care of himself, the same way we do," growled the foreman, following it with a threatening command to one of his men.

"That hardly seems fair," objected Phil.

"All is fair in war and the circus business. You seem a good deal interested in this competition business?" snapped the man with sudden suspicion in voice and face.

"I am. But where is this—this Sparling show going to—do you know what towns they are going to play for the next month? Can you tell that, too?"

"I can come pretty close to it," grinned the showman, whereupon he named the towns on Phil's route list without so much as missing one of them. But the stake and chain foreman did not stop here; he went on and gave a further list that Phil only knew of as having heard mentioned by Mr. Sparling in his various conversations with the circus lad.

Phil was amazed.

"Then they must be going west. I see," nodded the boy.

"No, you don't see. You only think you do."

"No?"

"No. If you was a showman and knew your business you'd know that the Sparling outfit was going to make a sudden turn after a little, and head for Dixie Land."

"Down south," exclaimed Phil.

"Sure. Why not? You see you lubbers don't know any more about the show business than—"

"And you are going to follow them?"

"Follow them? No. We're going to lead them. They'll follow us."

"You're like a wildcat train then?"

"Something of the sort."

"Where's the boss?"

"There he comes now. I'll have to hustle the men, or he'll scorch the grass off the lot with his roars."

The foreman hastened to stir up his surveyors and Phil moved off that he might get a better look at Mr. Sully, the owner of the show. Phil found him to be a florid-faced, square jawed man whose expression was as repulsive as it was brutal. Sully wore a red vest and red necktie with a large diamond in it. He gave the Circus Boy a quick sharp look as he passed. "I'll bet he will know me the next time he sees me," muttered Phil. "But whether he does or not I have made some discoveries that Mr. Sparling will be glad to know about, though they will not make him particularly happy, I'm thinking."

Phil was hungry, and he was anxious to get back to the village to write a letter, but decided that he would wait until the tents were up. Then again, he wanted to see the wagons brought on so he could count them and get a fair inventory of the show and what it possessed. He soon discovered that the Sully Hippodrome Circus was no one-horse affair, though considerably smaller than the one with which he was connected.

Not until the people were getting ready for the parade did Phil leave the lot. Then he hastened downtown and got his dinner and breakfast all in one, after which he sat down to write a full account of what he had learned to Mr. Sparling.

"There, if anything happens to me he is pretty well informed so far. It's enough to enable him to lay those plans he has in mind, whatever they may be. I can see him hammering his desk and getting red in the face when he reads this letter."

Phil was cautious enough not to mention the name of the Sully show in his letter, and tried to couch it in such terms, that while Mr. Sparling would understand perfectly, another might not.

Phil took the letter to the post office, then went out on the sidewalk where he stood leaning against a lamp post to watch the parade, which he did with critical eyes.

"A pretty good-sized show," he mused. "But all their trappings are second hand. They have bought them up from some show that has discarded them. That's one thing the Sparling outfit never does. All their stuff is new

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nearly every season. Sully may have some of our old trappings, for all I know."

The parade was a long one; there were a good many cages, besides a fair-sized herd of elephants.

"Hm-m-m! Three tuskers among the bulls," muttered Phil. "Pretty well up to our herd, but I wouldn't trade Emperor for any two of them, at that."

After the parade had passed, Phil once more strolled over to the circus lot and hung about until time for the afternoon performance to begin, when he bought a ticket and entered, occupying a reserved seat where he could see all that was going on.

The lad smiled at the thought of how his position had changed. He was so used to being over there in the ring that it did not seem quite right for him to be occupying a chair in the audience. He could scarcely resist the impulse to hurry back to the dressing tent and prepare for the ring.

The grand entry came on; then his attention was centered on the performance, which he watched with the keen eyes of an expert, noting the work of every performer, completely forgetting the cheering audience in his absorption.

It was really a fair performance. He was forced to admit this, especially of the aerial acts. But the bareback riding he did not think compared favorably with his own, especially so far as the men riders were concerned. One woman rider was very good, indeed.

Phil drew a long breath when the performance had come to an end. A circus performance, to him, was a matter of the keenest interest. The fact that he himself was a circus performer did not lessen that interest one whit, but rather intensified it. Yet the glamour of his youthful days had passed. It was now a professional interest, rather than the wondering interest of a boy who never had seen the inside of the dressing tent.

Phil did not hang about the grounds. He went downtown, but was once more on hand for the evening performance, where he noted that the show was cut short fully half an hour, and this without apparent good reason.

He had made the acquaintance of a "candy butcher" during the hour before the show, and from him had learned some further details that were of interest to him and his investigation.

The Circus Boy, after watching the striking of the tents, returned to the railroad station and took a late train for the town where the circus was to show next day. It was not a long run, so he took a day coach. In it he saw several familiar faces—faces that he had noticed about the circus lot that afternoon, and from their appearance he was forced to conclude that these men belonged to the shows.

"Those fellows are crooks, as sure as I am alive," decided the lad, after listening to the conversation of the couple just ahead of him. "That's what Mr. Sparling told me. I could hardly believe it. I'll spend part of the time outside tomorrow and make sure. I shall know those fellows when I see them, if they are on the grounds."

It had not occurred to Phil Forrest that he might be recognized also, though he knew full well that circus people had keen eyes, especially in an outfit such as this.

The next morning he hunted up his friend the candy butcher, inviting that worthy to take breakfast with him which the lad, a boy about his own age, was glad to do. From the "butcher" Phil learned a whole lot of things that added to his store of knowledge, among them being the fact that Sully's outfit was even worse than it had been painted.

Mingling with the crowds about the main entrance, before the doors were opened that afternoon, Phil once more saw the same men he had observed on the train the previous evening. From their actions he was more than ever satisfied that he had not been mistaken in his estimate of them.

"I shouldn't be surprised if they were looking for some pockets to pick," mused the lad, "but I do not see them doing anything yet."

As a matter of fact, the men were plying their trade, but his eyes had not been quick enough to catch them at it. Phil, however, was more successful just before the evening show.

Standing among the people massed out in front he saw a man's hand steal slowly toward the handbag of a well-dressed woman. Phil traced the hand back until he made out the owner, who was one of the same men that had come through on the train with him.

A gasoline torch lighted the operation faintly, and Phil gazed with fascinated eyes while the stealthy hand opened the bag quickly extracting its contents.

Almost at the instant the woman looked down, perhaps attracted by the tug at the bag.

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"I've been robbed!" she cried.

The words stirred Phil to instant action.

In another second the thief felt a vise-like grip about the wrist that held the plunder.

"Here's the man that did it, madam. Call an officer," said Phil calmly.

CHAPTER X. THE CIRCUS BOY IS RECOGNIZED

Giving the wrist of his prisoner a sharp twist, Phil snatched away the small handful of bills that the fellow had stolen, returning them to the woman.

By this time the thief had suddenly recovered his wits and sought to jerk his hand away, seeing that it was merely a boy who had grabbed him. To the surprise of the crook he found it was not an easy matter to free himself from that grip. After making several desperate efforts the fellow adopted other methods.

"Let go of me, I tell you. I'll have you put away for this."

"I'll let go of you when a policeman has hold of you, and not before," retorted Phil. "You are a thief. I saw you steal that woman's money."

The man suddenly uttered an angry exclamation and launched a blow at Phil's head, which the lad avoided, allowing it to pass over his shoulder.

"Hurry! Get a policeman! This man is a thief," urged Phil, as he closed with his antagonist.

"Thief! Thief," cried several voices at once. It was a cry that had been heard before about the Sully shows.

Phil had not struck back at his enemy. Instead the lad, by a skillful twist, had whirled the fellow about until his back was toward the boy. Then Phil suddenly let go his hold on the wrist, claspng the man around the body and pinioning his arms to his sides.

"You might as well stand still," said the lad coolly. "You can't get away until I permit you to, and that won't be until something that looks like a policeman comes along."

In the meantime the captive was struggling and threatening. All at once he raised his voice in a peculiar, wailing cry. The Circus Boy felt sure that it was some sort of a signal, though it was new to him. But he was not to be cowed.

"Police!" shouted Phil.

"Police!" cried many voices.

Half a dozen men came rushing into the crowd, thrusting the people aside as they ran, looking this way and that to learn from where the cry for assistance had come.

Phil's captive uttered a sharp cry, and the lad realized what was going to happen. At first he had thought it was the police coming, but he was undeceived the moment he caught his prisoner's appeal to them. The men dashed toward the two, and as they rushed in Phil whirled his man so that the latter collided violently with the newcomers. That checked the rush briefly. He knew, however, that he could not hope to stand off his assailants for more than a few seconds. Yet the lad calculated that in those few seconds the police might arrive. He did not know that they had been well bribed neither to see nor to hear what occurred on the circus grounds.

A moment more and the lad had been roughly jerked from his captive and hurled violently to the ground.

Phil sprang up full of fight while the angry fellows closed in on him. He saw that they were showmen. A sudden idea occurred to him.

"Hey, Rube!" he shouted at the top of his voice, hoping that the rest of the show people within reach of his voice might crowd in and in the confusion give him a chance to get away.

And they did crowd in. They came on like a company of soldiers, sweeping everything before them. Phil, in that brief instant, while he was sparring to keep his opponents off, found time to smile grimly.

The fellow he had first made captive now attacked Phil viciously, the lad defending himself as best he could, while the people who had come to attend the show got out of harm's way as rapidly as possible. Phil could hope for no assistance from that quarter.

"I guess I have gotten myself into a worse scrape by calling the rest of the gang," he muttered, noting that he was being surrounded as some of the first comers pointed him out to the others.

Suddenly they fell upon Phil with one accord. He was jerked this way and that, but succeeded pretty well in dodging the blows aimed at his head, though his clothes were torn and he was pretty badly used.

Suddenly a voice roared out close behind him.

"Stop it!"

Turning his head a little Phil recognized Sully, the owner of the show. Sully's face was redder than ever.

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"What—what's all this row about? Haven't you fellows anything more important to do than raising a roughhouse? Get out of here, the whole bunch of you! What's he done? Turn him over to the police and go on about your business."

One of the men said something in a low tone to Sully. The showman shot a keen, inquiring glance at the lad.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I don't know that it makes any difference. I saw a fellow robbing a woman, and it was my duty to stop him. I did it, then a lot of his companions, who, I suppose, belong to your show pitched into me."

"So, you are trying to run the whole show, are you?"

"I am not."

"Well, you get off this lot as fast as you can hoof it. If I find you butting in again it will be the worse for you."

"That's the fellow who was hanging around the lot at St. Catharines yesterday," spoke up someone.

"Yes; I remember now, he was asking me questions," said another, whose voice Phil recognized as belonging to the foreman of the stake and chain gang. "I got to thinking about it afterwards, and realized that he was a little too inquisitive for a greenhorn. He's been on the lot all day again."

Mr. Sully surveyed Phil with an ugly scowl.

"What are you doing around here, young man?"

"For one thing, I am trying to prevent one of your followers robbing a woman," answered Phil boldly.

"Who are you?"

"That is my own affair."

"I know him! I know him! I Know!" shouted another.

Sully turned to him inquiringly.

"Who is he, if you know so much?"

"He's a fellow what was with the Sparling outfit last year. He was always butting in then, and I can tell you he ain't here for any good now, Boss."

"So, that's the game is it?" sneered Sully. "You come with me. I've got a few questions I want to ask you."

"I don't have to go with you," replied Phil.

"Oh, yes you do! Bring him along and if he raises a row just hand him one and put him to sleep."

Two men grabbed Phil roughly by his arms.

He jerked away and started to run when he was pounced upon and borne to the ground. Phil found himself grasped by the collar and jerked violently to his feet, with the leering face of Sully thrust up close to his own.

"I'll see that you don't get away this time," growled the showman.

Dragging the lad along by the collar further off on the lot, the showman finally paused.

"Get the carriage," he commanded sharply.

"What you going to do with me?" demanded Phil.

"That depends. I'm going to find out something about you first, and decide what to do with you later."

"And, when you get through, I shall have you arrested for assault. It will be my turn to act then," retorted the Circus Boy. "I have done nothing except to stop a miserable thief from plying his trade. I understand that's a game you—"

"That will do, young man. Here's the wagon. Now, if you go quietly you will have no trouble. But just try to call for help, or raise any sort of a ruction, and you'll see more stars than there are in the skies when the moon's on a strike. Get in there."

Phil was thrust into the closed carriage, which the showman used for driving back and forth between the train and the lot.

Quick as a flash Phil Forrest dived through the open coach window on the other side, and with equal quickness he was pounced upon by the driver, who had gotten off on that side, probably at a signal from Sully.

Had Sully not run around to the other side of the wagon Phil would have quickly disposed of the driver, strong as was the latter.

With an enraged cry Sully sprang upon Phil, and raised his hand to strike.

"If you attempt to do that you'll serve the rest of the season in jail," dared Phil, taking a bold course. "You know they don't trifle with brutes like you up here in Canada?"

Sully growled an unintelligible reply, but that he recognized the truth of the lad's words was evident when he

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slowly dropped his clenched fist to his side.

"I'll see that you don't get away this time," he said once more thrusting Phil into the carriage, this time, however, keeping a firm grip on the lad's arm.

The driver whipped up the horse and the carriage rumbled away, soon reaching the village street and turning sharply off into a side street.

CHAPTER XI. ON SULLY'S PRIVATE CAR

"Where are you taking me?" Phil demanded.

"You'll see in a minute."

"And so will you. There are laws to punish such high-handed methods as yours, and I'll see that you are punished, and well punished, too. If I can't do it, there are others who will—who will see that you get what you deserve."

"Keep on talking. It will be my turn pretty soon," answered Sully.

In a short time Phil discovered that they were driving along by the railroad tracks. He knew that the yards where the circus train was standing were only a short distance beyond.

"I guess he's going to take me to the train, for some reason or other," decided Phil, but he could not understand what the showman's motive might be.

The Circus Boy was not afraid, but he was thoroughly angry. His grit and stubbornness had been aroused and he was ready to take any desperate chance. However, he felt that, after all, this capture might be the means of giving him the further information of which he was in search. He might possibly be able to draw some admission from Sully.

They drew up beside the tracks and the carriage halted.

"Now, not a sound!" warned the showman. "If you raise your voice, or so much as speak to anyone you see, I'll forget that you are a kid and—"

"I am not afraid of your threats," interrupted Phil. "I know you are brute enough to do what you say you will, but it won't be good for you if you do. Go on. I'll follow till I get a chance to escape."

"You'll not get the chance," retorted Sully, taking firm hold of the boy's arm.

They made their way through the yards, avoiding the gasoline torches that flared familiarly here and there among the mass of cars, then turned toward the station. As the lights of the latter came into view, the showman halted, looked up and down the tracks, then led Phil to the platform of a car which the boy recognized as being one of the show's sleepers.

"That's what I thought he was up to," muttered Phil, watching for an opportunity to leap off the other side and lose himself among the cars.

No such opportunity was offered to him, however, and a moment later the door of the sleeper had been opened, and he was pushed roughly inside, Mr. Sully following in quickly, slamming and locking the door behind them.

"Get in there and sit down!"

"Where?"

"In the private office there."

"So this is your private car, is it?"

"Yes."

"Hm—m—m!"

"You seem to know a lot about the show business."

Phil made no reply, but dropped into the owner's chair at the latter's desk.

"Get out of that chair!"

"I thought you invited me to sit down?"

"I did, but I might have known you wouldn't have had sense enough to sit where you ought to."

"Where's that?"

"On the floor."

"I am not in the habit of being received that way," taunted Phil, making no move to vacate the chair.

Sully, with a grunt of disapproval, sat down in another chair, placing himself so the light would fall fully on Phil's face.

"Now, what's your name?"

"You'll have to guess that," smiled Phil.

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"That's where you're wrong. I know it."

"What is my name?"

"Forrest. You're a bareback rider in the Sparling outfit. You thought you would not be known, but you see you are. You can't fool a man in the show business so easily. After you have grown older in the business you will learn a few things."

"I am learning fast," laughed the lad. "I am learning a lot of things that I wish I did not have to learn."

"What, for instance?"

"That there are such men as you in the show business."

"Be careful, boy. You will go too far, the first thing you know. Now, what are you doing here?"

"If you know so much I don't see why you should have to ask that question."

"I'm asking."

"And I'm not telling. I'll answer none of your questions, unless it is about something that I can tell you without getting others into trouble."

"You already have admitted that you are with the Sparling show. You have made several slips of the tongue since I got hold of you."

"I haven't denied that I am with the Sparling show, neither have I admitted it. I decline to lie or to give you any information of any nature whatever."

"When is the Sparling show coming here?"

"I was not aware that it was coming here. Is it?"

"No, I didn't mean that. I mean when are they going to show in Corinto?"

Phil was silent.

"You might as well make a clean breast of the whole business, young man. I've caught you red-handed, snooping about the lot for two days quizzing everybody. Now what's the game?"

"There is no game."

"What is Sparling trying to find out?"

"You will have to ask him, I guess."

Sully surveyed the lad in silence for a minute or two.

"I couldn't understand, at first, why he should send a kid like you to spy upon us; but I begin to see that you are a sharp little monkey—"

Just then the showman was interrupted by the entrance of the foreman of the stake and chain gang.

"Bob, I want you to tell me exactly what questions this cub asked you yesterday?"

"I thought he was some curious town fellow, so I didn't pay much attention to his questions. When I saw him on the lot, again today, and heard him asking other folks, kind of careless like, I began to smell a rat."

"What did he want to know, I'm asking you?"

The foreman related as well as he could remember, just what conversation had taken place between himself and Phil Forrest, omitting, however, the fact that he had furnished any information. It would have ended his connection with the show right there, had he let the owner know how much he really had told.

Phil grinned appreciatively, but it was not for him to get the foreman into trouble.

"Hm—m!" mused Sully. "You found out a lot, I presume?"

"I can truthfully say that I found out that what I had heard about the show is true."

"And what's that, if I may ask?"

"Thieves. I happen to know that they travel right along with the show, and I shouldn't be surprised if you got part of their stealings, either," Phil boldly flung at the showman.

Sully's face went redder than ever, while his fingers clenched and unclenched. It was evident that the man feared to let his anger get the better of him.

"If he ever lets go at me, I'm a goner," thought Phil understanding that, besides an almost ungovernable temper, the man possessed great physical strength. "I guess he won't do anything of the sort, unless I goad him to it. I believe that I have said about enough."

"Watch him a minute, Bob," directed Sully, rising and stepping to the other end of the car. He returned a minute later.

"Young man," he said, "if you had been more civil you might have gotten away with your bluff—"

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"I have not tried to bluff you," interjected Phil.

"As it is, I think I'll lock you up until morning, and, if you are ready then to make a clean breast of the whole affair, perhaps I shall let you go back with a message to your boss—a message that he won't like, I reckon."

"You won't send any such message by me," retorted Phil. "Carry your own messages. Where you going to lock me up?"

"In a place where you will be safe. But I shouldn't advise you to get red-headed about it. There will be someone nearby to take all the howl out of you if you try it."

"You had better not!"

"What do you think, Bob? Is it safe to let this fellow go?"

"Well, I suppose you've got to let him go sometime. He'll be getting us into trouble if you keep him."

"I'll take the chance of that. We can drop him just before crossing the line back into the United States."

"That's a good game."

"Then the United States authorities can't take any action on an offense committed across the border. I don't believe they would, anyway. It is all a part of the show game. I'd like to drop the spy over the Falls when we get to Niagara," added Sully.

"I might get wet if you did that," grinned Phil.

"You'll be lucky if you don't get worse, which you will unless you keep a more civil tongue in your head. Yes; I guess that will be the best plan, Bob."

"You—you don't mean that you will drop him over the Falls?" gasped the foreman.

"No," laughed Sully. "Not that, much as I'd like to. But it would serve him right. I'm going to lock him up; that's what I mean."

"Where?"

"Here."

"But he'll get out."

"Not from where I put him."

The foreman looked about him a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"What do you say to the linen closet?"

"The linen closet?"

"Yes. I have just looked at it. There will be room enough for him, and there's no opening through which he can call to anyone on the outside. If he does make an outcry some of us will be here to look after him."

"That's a good game. I hadn't thought of it before."

"Come along, my fine young bareback rider. You'll wish you'd stuck to your own business before you get through with us!"

Phil was led down the side passageway of the car and thrust into a narrow compartment, about three sides of which were shelves loaded down with the linen used on the car.

There was room for a chair in the compartment and he could stand upright. However, had he wished to lie down he would have been unable to do so.

"So this is the prison you have decided to lock me in, is it?" grinned the lad.

"It looks that way. I guess it will bring you to your senses. You'll talk by tomorrow morning, I'll guarantee."

"I guess you will have another guess coming," warned Phil.

Without further parley Sully slammed the door and locked it, leaving Phil in absolute darkness.

"Now I am in a fix, for sure. If Sully hadn't been quite so big I should have taken a chance and pitched into him. He is strong enough to eat me alive. I could handle the fellow, Bob, all right, but not Sully. So I have got to stay here all night? Fine, fine! I hope I don't smother."

The car soon settled down to quiet again. Phil knew, however, that he was not alone—that undoubtedly there was someone watching his prison. He examined the place as well as he could in the darkness, tried the door, ran his hands over the sides and up among the piles of linen. There was scant encouragement to be found, though Phil believed that if he had room to take a running start he might break the door down.

He decided to remain quiet, and after his exciting experiences he was quite willing to rest himself for a time. The lad pulled a lot of the linen down to the floor, and making a bed for himself, doubled up like a jackknife and settled himself for the night. It was not a comfortable position, but Phil Forrest was used to roughing it. In a few

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minutes he was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XII. LOCKED IN THE LINEN CLOSET

Phil roused himself for a moment.

"We're going," he muttered, realizing that the train was in motion. Then he dropped off to sleep again.

When next he awakened it was broad daylight, though the lad did not know it until after he had struck a match and looked at his watch.

"Eight 'clock in the morning," he exclaimed. "My, how I must have slept, and on such a bed too!"

The lad was lame and sore from the cramped position in which he had been obliged to lie all night, but he was just as cheerful as if he had awakened in his own berth on sleeper number eleven on the Sparling train. He began to feel hungry, though.

Phil tapped on the door. There was no response, so he rapped again, this time with more force. Still failing to arouse anyone Phil delivered a series of resounding kicks against the door.

"If no one answers that I'll know there is nobody here and I'll see if I can't break the door down."

There was someone there, however, as was made plain a moment later, when the door was thrown suddenly open, revealing the grinning face of Sully, the owner of the show.

"Morning," greeted Phil. "I thought maybe breakfast was being served in the dining car, and I didn't want to miss it."

"You're a cheerful idiot, aren't you?"

"So I have been told. But about that breakfast? If you'll kindly conduct me to the wash room, so I can make myself beautiful and prepare for breakfast, I shall be obliged to you."

"Huh!" grunted the showman.

"Where are we?"

"Brant."

"Is this where we show today?"

"Yes, this is where we show today. As if you didn't know that as well as I do."

"I may have heard something to that effect. I don't just remember for the moment. But, how about that breakfast?"

"How do you know you are going to get any breakfast?"

"Because I smelled it a few minutes ago."

"That's my breakfast that your keen nose scented, young man."

"Well, I guess I can stand it for once."

Sully was forced to smile at his young captive's good nature. So he took Phil by the arm and led him to the wash room, where the showman remained until Phil had completed his preparations for breakfast. Then Sully led the way to a compartment at the rear of the car where a small table had been set.

"This looks good to me," grinned Phil, rubbing his palms together. "You live high in this outfit, don't you?"

The lad ate his breakfast with a will.

"I hope I am not depriving you of your meal?" questioned Phil, glancing up quickly.

"I've had my breakfast. If there had been only enough for one, you'd have gone hungry."

"You don't have to tell me that. I know it. That's about your measure."

"That will be about all from you," snapped the showman. "The trouble with you is that you can't appreciate decent treatment. You're just like your boss."

"I'll not hear you say a word against Mr. Sparling," bristled Phil, then suddenly checked himself.

"So, I caught you that time, did I?" exclaimed Sully, slapping his thighs and laughing uproariously, while Phil's face grew red with mortification at the slip he had made. "You are not half as smart as you think you are, young man. I'll keep at you until I get out of you all the information I want."

"I'm afraid the show season isn't long enough for you to do that," was the boy's quick retort.

"You'll find out whether it is or not."

"I shall not be with you that long. Now that I have admitted that I have been connected with the Sparling show, what do you think my employer will do when he finds I am missing?"

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"Nothing."

"I rather guess he will do something. Wait."

"When does he expect you back?"

Phil looked at the showman, laughing.

"Did I mention that I was expected? I said that when he missed me there would be an inquiry, and there will."

"Little good that will do him," growled the showman.

"Then you don't know James Sparling."

"How'll he know you are here?"

"Trust him to find out, and then—wow! There will be an explosion that you can hear on the other side of the St. Lawrence. Do I take a walk for my health after breakfast?"

"You do."

"Thank you."

"To the other end of the car, to the linen closet, where you are to stay until—"

"Until what?" questioned Phil sharply.

"Until you tell me what I want to know."

"What is it that you wish to know?"

"Why were you sent to spy on my outfit?"

"Perhaps for the same reason that you keep a spy in his camp," retorted Phil, bending a keen gaze on the face of his jailer.

Sully's face went violently red. Without another word he grasped Phil roughly by the shoulder, jerked him from the table and hurried the lad down the corridor.

"Here, here, I haven't finished my breakfast yet," protested the boy.

"You have, but you don't know it. You will know in a minute."

With that the showman thrust Phil into the linen closet again and slammed the door.

"My, I wouldn't have a temper like yours if you were to make me a present of a six-pole circus!" called the Circus Boy.

He chuckled as Sully uttered a grunt of anger and strode off to the other end of the car.

"He'll be going to the lot after a while, then I'll get busy," muttered Phil. In the meantime there was nothing for him to do but to sit down and make the best of his situation, which he did. Once, during the morning, Phil, believing himself to be alone, made several desperate attempts to break the door down.

His efforts brought a threat from the corridor as to what would happen if he tried that again. Phil knew, then, that he was not to be left alone.

After a while the lad went to sleep, not awakening until late in the afternoon.

He got no supper that night, nor did the showman come near him until late on the following morning. Phil was ravenously hungry, not having had a thing to eat in twenty-four hours, but he had too much grit to utter a word of complaint.

An excellent breakfast was served, but instead of Mr. Sully one of his men sat at the table while another stood out in the corridor ready to take a hand in case the boy made an effort to escape.

Had there been an open window near him Phil would have tried a dive through it, taking the chance of getting away. The windows in the room where the breakfast was served had been prudently shut, however.

He had just finished his breakfast when Sully came storming in. The lad could see that he was very angry about something.

"Good morning, sir. Aren't you feeling well this morning?" questioned Phil innocently.

"Feeling—feeling—" The words seemed to choke in the showman's throat.

"Yes, feeling."

"Why—why—why didn't you tell me that Sparling had changed his date and was planning to make Corinto the same day we are billed there?" thundered Sully.

"Is he?"

"Is he? You know very well that he is, and it was your report that put him up to doing this trick. We've got you to thank for this piece of business, and you're going to pay dear for your part in it. Is he going to follow us all around the country—is that what he's planning to do?"

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"I guess you had better ask Mr. Sparling himself. He hasn't seen fit to tell me, as yet."

"I'll show him that he can't trifle with me, and I'll show you, so you won't forget it for the rest of your circus career."

"I wouldn't make threats were I in your place, Mr. Sully. Wait until you get over your mad fit; then you'll be glad you didn't say anything you might have to take back later on," advised Phil.

"Take back? Take back?"

"Yes."

For the moment the showman was too far overcome with emotion to speak. Then he uttered a roar and stamped out of the car.

"Say, when is he going to let me out of here?"

"Not till we get to the border," answered the attendant.

"When will that be?"

"I don't know for sure. I guess maybe a month."

"You don't mean he is going to keep me in that linen cupboard for a full month—you can't mean that?"

"Can't say about that. I guess that's it. If you're finished with your breakfast—"

"I have been finished for sometime."

"Then you'll have to git back to the coop again."

Phil reluctantly rose, but his keeper kept tight hold of him, and the man on guard out in the corridor walked ahead of the boy on down to the linen closet, where Phil was once more thrust in and the door closed on him.

He had not been there long before he heard Sully enter the car with one of his men. All at once their voices seemed to come to him clearly and distinctly. The lad did not remember to have heard voices there so plainly before.

This time Phil began looking about to see if there were not really an opening in his chamber. He found it at the top over one of the shelves, a small grill, over which a curtain had been stretched. Phil lost no time in climbing up to it. He peered out and saw the men plainly. With Sully was his parade manager, and they were talking excitedly.

Phil opened his eyes wide when he began to realize the enormity of the plan that they were discussing.

CHAPTER XIII. THROUGH RINGS OF FIRE

"If there should happen to be a wind we might cut a rope or two and let the big top down on them," suggested parade manager.

"Yes; it would put them out of business for the night performance, but we don't want them to fill up for the afternoon show. That's when they are going to get the money. You see, Sparling's show is bigger and better known than ours, and showing there the same day we are liable to get the worst of it. Can't you suggest anything else?"

"If you don't like letting the big top down on their heads, and providing there is no wind to make the attempt worthwhile, I would suggest another way."

"The scoundrels!" breathed the listener above their heads.

"What's your suggestion?"

"Stampede the elephants."

"That's a dandy! And we know how to do it, eh, Lawrence?"

The parade manager nodded emphatically.

"They'll never know what happened to them. We can do it before the show gets to the lot if you think best?"

Sully shook his head.

"No. We'll wait till just as the doors are about to open for the afternoon show. Mind you, I'm not saying we shall do it. I'll think about the matter. Perhaps I can think up a better plan after I have gone over the matter."

"Where's that boy you told me about?"

Sully motioned toward the end of the car where Phil was locked in the linen closet.

"What you going to do with him?"

"Drop him when I get ready."

"But aren't you afraid the other outfit will get wind of what you are doing? It's pretty dangerous business to lock up a fellow like that."

"I don't care whether they get wise to it or not. They won't know where he is. After we get to the border I don't care a rap for them," and the showman snapped his fingers disdainfully. "They can't touch us on the other side of the Niagara River and they'd better not try it. Maybe Sparling won't be in business by that time," grinned the showman with a knowing wink.

Sully rose, and shortly afterwards left the car with his parade manager.

Phil sat down on the floor of his compartment with head in hands, trying to think what he had better do. These men were planning a deliberate campaign to wreck his employer's show.

"Something must be done!" breathed the boy, clenching his fists until the nails bit into the flesh, "But what can I do, I can do nothing unless I can get away from here, and they will not let me out, at least not until we have gotten by Corinto."

The more he thought and planned the greater his perplexity became. There seemed no way out of it. His only hope now seemed to lie in Mr. Sparling becoming alarmed at his absence, and instituting a search for him. His employer would quickly divine something of the truth after Phil had remained silent for two or three days. Perhaps, even now, the owner of the Great Sparling Combined Shows had sent someone on to learn what had become of his star bareback rider.

Phil's train of thought was suddenly interrupted by the door of his compartment being violently jerked open.

The lad's first impulse was to tell Sully, who now stood facing him, what he had overheard. Upon second thought, however, Phil decided that it would be much better to give the showman no intimation of what he had learned.

"Come out, young man."

Phil complied, glad to be free of his narrow chamber, no matter what the reason for the summons might be.

"What do you wish of me now?"

"Come into my office and I'll tell you. I understand you are a bareback rider," continued Sully, after they had seated themselves in his little office, the door being locked behind them.

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"So you say."

"And a good one at that?"

Phil made no answer. He had not the least idea what was coming.

"My principal bareback rider stepped on a switch frog this morning and turned his ankle. He is out of the running for a week. I need a man more than I ever did. Do you want to join this show?"

Phil gazed at him in amazement.

"You haven't money enough to induce me to."

"Perhaps I have, but I won't induce with it," grinned the owner. "I've a plan to suggest."

"What is it?"

"If you will ride for me until we get to Corinto I'll give you seventy-five dollars."

The Circus Boy was on the point of making an emphatic refusal, when he suddenly checked himself and remained silent, as if thinking the proposition over.

"Well, what do you say?"

"If I do as you wish, when will you let me go?"

"Perhaps after we leave Corinto."

"I don't believe you intend to do anything of the sort."

"You think I'd lie to you?" blustered Sully.

"I'm not saying that. But I know you are not above doing worse things. I'll tell you what I will do."

"Yes."

"I'll ride for you today for twenty-five dollars."

"Done!"

"Payable in advance, you know."

"I guess you don't trust me?"

"Not for a minute."

"Well, I must say you are brutally frank."

"That's the way I do business," answered the lad proudly.

"But see here, young man, you must agree that you will make no effort to get away," demanded the showman a sudden thought occurring to him.

"I shall make no such agreement. If I get a chance to get away I'll do it, you may depend upon that. I will agree, however, to make no outcry nor to appeal to anyone to help me. If I can't manage it my own way, I'll stay here till I can. Remember, I'm going to beat you if I can, and if I can't, why Mr. Sparling will settle with you. He will do it properly, too."

The showman leaned back and guffawed loudly.

"I never saw a kid like you yet. You beat anything that ever got into a freak tent. You are so infernally honest that you give me notice you're going to try to escape from me. Thanks, my boy, for the timely warning. I'll see to it that you don't get away until I am ready to lose you. If you try it you must expect some rough treatment, and you'll get it too."

"Very well; I accept the terms. How about the payment in advance?"

Sully drew a roll of bills from his pocket counting out the sum agreed upon.

"If you should happen to get away I'd be out the money?"

"I'll send it back to you in that event."

"Ho, ho, ho! I believe you would, at that."

"I certainly shall."

"Say, kid, don't it ever give you pain to be so awfully honest?"

"I'll confess that it does when I am doing business with a man like you."

"Oh! That one landed. That was a knockout," chuckled the showman, rising. "I'll be back after you with the rig pretty soon. We've got to fix up some togs for you to ride in, but I guess we can do that all right. I'll have to put you back in your cage in the meantime." It lacked an hour and a half of the time for the afternoon performance to begin when Sully called with his carriage for his new star. Phil was ready, as far as he was able to be, and really welcomed the opportunity to get out in the air again. But he was so stiff from the confinement in the narrow linen closet that he did not feel as if he should be able to ride at all.

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The drive to the circus lot was without incident, and Phil embraced the opportunity to familiarize himself with the town and its surroundings as fully as was possible under the circumstances. He had tried to form some plan by which to make his escape, but had given it up and decided to trust to luck.

There was another reason for his having decided to ride in the Sully Hippodrome Show that day, and every day thereafter, providing he was not able to get away before leaving Corinto. He hoped that Mr. Sparling might have sent someone on to find out what had become of him. This was sure to be done sooner or later, especially when the showman found that his letters were not being answered, but were being returned to him, as had been arranged for before Phil left his own show.

Reaching the lot they drove around to the paddock where Phil and his new employer entered the dressing tent. Even there the lad was given no chance to break away. It seemed to him that every person connected with the show had been set to watch him. When he entered the dressing tent he was subjected to the curious gaze of the performers, most of whom understood that he was to ride that day in the place of the injured performer, but who knew nothing further about the matter.

Some difficulty was experienced in getting a pair of tights that would fit Phil, but after awhile this was arranged.

"You sit down here and wait now," directed Mr. Sully.

"No; I've got something else to do. Bring the horse out in the paddock and let me see what I have to ride," answered Phil.

While they were getting out the ring horse, the lad indulged in a series of bends and limbering exercises out in the paddock, working until the perspiration stood out in great beads.

This done Phil sprang up to the back of the ring horse, and while an attendant held the animal in a circle with a long leading strap, Phil rode the horse about the paddock a few times until he had become familiar with the motion and peculiarities of the animal.

"How is he in the ring, fast or slow?"

"Just steady. Been at it a long time," the attendant informed him. "He's steady. You can depend on him."

"Yes; he acts so. I'll look at the ring when I go in."

The owner of the show had been a keen observer of these preparations. He noted, too, Phil appeared entirely to have forgotten about his desire to escape.

"That kid acts to me as if he knew his business," he reflected. "If he rides the way I think he can, I'm going to get him away from Sparling if I have to double the wages he's drawing now. And money talks!"

The band began to play in the big top. Phil glanced at the showman.

"When do I go on?"

"Second number."

The lad nodded, and sat awaiting his turn to enter the arena. He did not have to ask when the moment had arrived. The attendant started to lead the ring horse in and Phil quickly fell in behind, following them in.

Right behind the Circus Boy came Sully, the owner of the show, never taking his eyes off his captive for a moment. This amused the lad. He grinned broadly. It was a novel experience for him.

Soon the strains of music told him this was where he was to begin his act. The boy swung gracefully to the back of his mount. Instantly he had leaped to his feet Sully clapped his hands together approvingly.

"That's the way to do it. You've got the other fellow skinned forty ways!" he cried.

"In some ways," replied Phil significantly. "Otherwise not."

The ring was in excellent shape, much to the boy's surprise, and the horse was the best he ever had ridden. In a few moments Phil began to feel very much at home and to enjoy himself thoroughly.

The ring attendants brought out strips of bright yellow cloth, which two clowns held across the ring for the Circus Boy to leap over as his horse passed under. This did not bother him in the least, though he had never tried the act before. It was a relic of the old circus days that few shows had retained.

But Phil was on the point of balking when a clown came out with a handful of hoops covered with paper.

"You want me to jump through those things?" he questioned, during a brief intermission.

"Sure."

"Does the other man do that?"

"He does."

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"Then I can do it, I guess."

"I reckon you can do anything on a horse that you happen to feel like," said the showman.

The band started up again and Phil sprang to his feet. A paper hoop was raised on the opposite side of the ring, the lad eyeing it hesitatingly.

"I'll go through it if I break my neck trying," he muttered, shutting his lips tightly together.

Smash!

The Circus Boy hurled himself through the tender paper, but the breaking paper stung his face like the crack of a whip lash, and Phil, instead of landing on his feet as he should have done, struck the back of his ring horse on all fours.

Sully growled angrily.

"You make a blunder like that again, and you'll be sorry for it," he bullied, shaking an angry fist at Phil, who turned a pair of surprised eyes on the showman.

"See here," retorted the lad with rising color, "I'm not in the habit of being talked to like that. If you don't like my riding I'll end the act right here. I'm not obliged to ride for you, you know."

"Go on, go on!" snapped the owner.

The next hoop Phil took as easily as if he had been doing that very same thing all through the season.

"Fine!" chuckled Sully. "He's a star performer, even if he does give me as good as I send."

Phil was hurling himself through a succession of hoops now. Then all at once, to his surprise and disapproval, five hoops of fire flared up before him and on all sides of him.

"Go through them!" shouted the showman.

"I won't!"

"You can't stop now. Are you going to let a little thing like that give you an attack of cold feet?" demanded Sully.

Thus appealed to, Phil Forrest thought better of it.

"Yip!—yip!" he cried sharply to the ring horse, riding straight at the first ring which he took without difficulty, though the hot flame on his cheeks made him shrink himself into a smaller compass than had been the case with the paper rings.

The audience was applauding him wildly, for somehow this slender, youthful figure appealed to them more strongly than had any other performer in the show thus far. One after another Phil took the flaming rings until he came to the last one which he approached with more confidence than he had any of the others.

He hurled himself at it with less caution than before. As he entered the hoop of fire his elbows caught it, and instantly the lad felt the fire burning through his silk ring shirt.

Without an instant's hesitation the boy leaped up into the air, clearing his horse by a full two feet.

The force of his throw sent the ring of fire soaring through the air, as he had, with quick intuition, imagined that it would.

Phil threw a splendid backward somersault almost slipping off the hips of the ring horse.

"Great!" exploded the owner.

The audience applauded wildly.

But the next instant Sully was not shouting approving words. The burning ring had slipped neatly over his own head and before he could throw it off, his clothes, as well, were on fire. Throwing himself down in the sawdust the showman rolled and rolled, uttering loud imprecations and threats, while audience and performers fairly screamed with delight.

He was up in a flash, expecting to find Phil making a dash for freedom.

"Stop him!" he bellowed.

Phil Forrest sat on the rump of the ring horse, grinning broadly at the predicament of the owner of the Sully Hippodrome Circus.

CHAPTER XIV. A DASH FOR FREEDOM

"Well, you are a star rider, anyway," announced Sully, with emphasis when he was once more leading Phil to the carriage to take him back to the linen closet on board the private car.

But Sully was less violent, and there was a twinkle in his eyes that Phil did not fail to catch.

"He's planning something," thought the boy, after being once more locked in his compartment. "I shouldn't be surprised if I had ridden a little too well today. But it's going to be the means of getting me my freedom. Someone surely will see me and recognize me."

That night Phil rode again, winning even greater applause than he had done at the afternoon performance. But a closer watch was kept over him, as Sully had imagined that the opportunities were greater for escape than in broad daylight. Phil had reasoned it out the same way, but he was in no hurry. He had done up his money in a little bag which he hung about his neck each time before going into the ring, so that it might not be stolen while he was performing, for, it will be remembered that the lad had no trunk in which to keep his valuables.

No chance to escape presented itself during the evening, however, and the lad was forced to return to his imprisonment again after the night performance.

"If you expect me to be in working order you should give me a decent place to sleep," he told Sully, while they were sitting at lunch in the private car that night.

Sully grinned and winked an eye.

"See anything green in my eye?"

"No. It's all red. I guess you see red most of the time."

"If you'll give me a promise, I'll let you sleep in a berth in this car tonight."

"What promise?" asked Phil, though he knew pretty well what the showman would demand.

"That you won't try to escape."

"I'll make no such promise."

"Then it's the linen closet for your."

"All right; I will sleep in the linen closet. I suppose you will want me to ride again tomorrow?"

"Sure thing!"

"Then don't forget the twenty-five dollars in advance."

"Say, that's more money than I'll pay for that act, good as it is," protested the showman.

"Very well; then I will stay in the closet and you can cut your bareback out. You do not have to pay it unless you want to."

Sully growled and handed out the money.

Phil put it in his pocket with a smile and half audible chuckle that did not tend to make Sully feel any the less irritable.

"Perhaps it is a good thing that I am a prisoner if I have got to stay with this outfit."

"Why?" snapped the showman.

"Because some of your light-fingered gentlemen would be dipping into my pocket, when I wasn't looking, and take the money away from me. That's the way you would get it back."

"That will be about all for you, boy," growled the showman. "That is, unless you are willing to tell me what you are here for?"

The Circus Boy laughed lightly.

"I have nothing new to say to that question."

"You've done your part well. You must have got busy pretty quick to have tipped off Sparling before we caught you."

"Tipped him off to what?" inquired Phil.

"Well, never mind what. You know and so do I."

After that the lad was sent to his closet to spend the night. The next day was a repetition of the previous one, except that Phil rode better than ever, if that were possible. But as he was riding under the name of the performer who had been injured, he could not make himself known.

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Saturday came along, with the lad apparently as far from making his escape as ever. But what he had hoped would come to pass had done so in a measure. That is, the owner of the show had become a little careless in watching the boy.

Instead of accompanying Phil into the ring, Sully satisfied himself with standing by the entrance to the paddock, next to the bandstand.

This left Phil free to do pretty much as he chose, but he was almost as closely confined as if he were in the owner's private car, so far as getting away was concerned. But the boy's mind was working actively.

As he sat on the back of the broad-backed ring horse that afternoon, his eyes were looking over the tent questioningly.

"I believe I can do it," mused Phil. "If conditions are the same tonight that they are this afternoon I am going to try it."

Just then the band struck up and the lad rose gracefully to his feet ready to go through his act for the edification of the great audience.

Phil was making more money than ever before in his circus career, and he now had only one act instead of several. But he cared little for this. It was merely a means to an end.

At night he accompanied Sully to the lot as usual. Phil might have appealed to a policeman, or to one of the many people about him. It will be remembered, however, that he had given his word that he would do nothing of the sort, and Phil Forrest was not the boy to break his word after once having given it. He proposed to get away by his own efforts or else wait until rescued by the Sparling show.

As had been the case with the afternoon show Sully remained over by the bandstand while Phil went through his act.

"I'll finish my performance," decided the lad. "I want to give him his money's worth whether he deserves such treatment or not, and then I'll make my try. I can do it, I believe."

Nothing of what was passing in the mind of the Circus Boy, of course, was suspected by the owner of the show. Phil had just rounded off his act by a backward somersault and the attendant had slipped the bridle over the head of the ring horse preparatory to leading the animal back to the paddock and horse tent.

"You run along. I will ride him back," directed Phil innocently.

"Why?"

"Because I prefer to."

"Very well," answered the groom, turning away and walking slowly toward the paddock, while Phil, who had in the meantime slipped off to the ring, was quickly drawing on his slippers.

By this time Mr. Sully was looking at him, wondering why Phil did not get out of the ring, for another act was coming on, the performers for which already were moving down the concourse.

All at once the Circus Boy threw himself to the back of his mount, landing astride.

Phil brought his riding whip down on the back of the surprised animal with a force that sent the horse forward with a snort. They bounded out of the ring. Instead, however, of turning toward the paddock exit, Phil headed straight for the other end of the tent. There an exit led into the menagerie tent, or where that tent had been, for by this time it had been taken down and carted away to the train. A canvas flap hung loosely over the entrance, but it was not fastened down, as Phil well knew, being left free so people could pass in and out at will.

"Stop him!"

It was the voice of Sully and might have been heard in every part of the big top, though the people did not know what the command meant.

For the moment the circus attendants did not understand either. They had not noticed Phil riding away in the wrong direction.

"Stop him, I say!"

An attendant discovered what was going on and started on a run for Phil, who brought his whip down on the flanks of the ring horse again and again, driving the animal straight at the attendant. The result was that the fellow was bowled over in a twinkling. The horse cleared the man at a bound.

At this the audience roared. They saw that something unusual was taking place, though they did not understand what it all meant.

Half a dozen men ran toward Phil, while Sully himself was charging down the concourse as fast as he could

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go, roaring out his commands at the top of his powerful voice.

"Get a horse and follow him!" he shouted. "Run back and send one of the men out around the tent to head him off! He's running away with my best ring horse!"

Phil swept through the exit, bowling over two men who were standing there on guard, and nearly running down a group of boys who were standing just outside trying to get a glimpse into the tent.

As he gained the outer air he heard the hoof beats of a running horse bearing down on him from the left side of the big top.

The Circus Boy knew what that meant. They were after him already.

CHAPTER XV. OUTWITTING THE PURSUERS

"Oh, if only I had a faster horse!" Forrest breathed. "I am afraid this old ring horse never will be able to get away from them."

Phil was urging the animal with voice and whip, but it was difficult to get the animal into a faster pace than his regular ring gait—the gait that he had been following for many years. This was scarcely faster than a man could trot.

Phil espied a pole wagon partially loaded, just ahead of him. At sight of it a sudden idea occurred to him. He acted at once.

Riding close to the wagon the lad slipped off and, giving the horse a sharp blow with the whip over one hip, Phil ducked under the wagon.

The ring horse galloped on a few rods and then stopped.

"I guess it's time I was getting away from here," decided the lad. "I'll be caught sure, if I do not hurry."

The lot was in an uproar. Men were running this way and that, and above the din could be heard the voice of the owner, roaring out orders.

Phil, being still in his pink tights, was a conspicuous figure. He knew that if a ray from a torch should chance to rest on him for a moment, they would discover him at once.

Running in a crouching position the boy made for the further side of the lot, where he hoped to get far enough away so that he could straighten up and make better time.

He did finally reach a safe place, and climbing a board fence, dropped on the other side and lay down to await developments. These were not long coming. All at once he discovered half a dozen men running directly toward him. Whether they had caught sight of him or not, he did not know. He did know that it was time to leave.

Phil left. Springing up, he fairly flew over the ground.

The men caught sight of him, as he realized when one of them uttered a yell. But Phil was a faster runner than any of them and in a few minutes, darting this way and that, and finally doubling on his tracks in a wide circle, he succeeded in outwitting them.

"The question is, what am I going to do now?" he asked himself, pausing abruptly. "In this rig I don't dare go into the town, or they will nab me on some trumped up charge and then I shall be worse off. Now I am free, even if I haven't got much on me in the way of clothing. I might as well not have anything so far as keeping warm is concerned." Phil shivered, for the night was cool and a heavy dew falling.

"I know what I'll do. I'll slip back to the lot and perhaps I shall be able to find something to put on. There's usually plenty of coats lying about on the wagons."

Now that the uproar had ceased Phil crept back toward the circus lot, lying down in the grass whenever he heard a sound near him and peering into the darkness.

At the risk of being discovered he crawled up to a wagon, climbed aboard and searched it diligently for clothes. He found none. Keenly disappointed, Phil made his way to the pole wagon under which he had taken refuge in his first effort at getting away. This, he found, was loaded ready to be taken to the train. At any moment, now, a team might be hitched to it.

"I guess I'll have to hurry!" muttered the lad. Phil's knowledge of circus affairs stood him in good stead now.

To the boy's delight, he found a bundle in which were a coat and a pair of overalls, rolled up and stowed under the driver's seat.

"Fine!" chuckled Phil. "It's a good deal like stealing, but I have to have them and I'll send the fellow a new pair if ever I get back to my own show. He'll be mad in the morning when he goes to get his clothes. I wish I had a hat and pair of shoes. But I guess I ought to be thankful for what I already have."

Saying this, Phil dropped from the wagon and quickly got into the clothes. They were old and dirty, but he did not mind that. They were clothes and they would cover his conspicuous ring costume, which was the most important thing for him to consider at the present moment.

"Now, I'll buy a ticket and get started for Corinto," he decided.

Phil reached under the neck of his shirt for his little bag of money.

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"Oh, pshaw! I've lost it. Let me see, did I put my money in there before I entered the ring?"

For the life of him he was unable to say whether he had done so, or whether his money was still in his clothes back in the dressing tent.

"Well, I shall never see that money again, I am thinking. If I left it in my clothes it is gone by this time, and if I didn't it is gone anyway," was his logical conclusion.

The first thing to be done now was to get off the lot, which Phil did as quickly as possible. Clad in the soiled, well-worn garments with his coat buttoned tightly about his neck, the lad attracted no special attention. Getting well away from the circus grounds, he halted to consider what his next move should be.

"I guess I'll go over to the station and get some information," he decided. This he did, but the lights looked so bright in the station that he did not consider it prudent to enter. So Phil waited about until he saw one of the railroad switchmen coming in from the yards.

"How far is it to Corinto, please?" he asked.

"Fifty miles."

"Whew! So far as that?"

"Yes. Belong to the show?"

"Well, not exactly. I'm with them, but I can't say that I belong to the outfit, and I'm glad I don't."

"Should think you would be glad," growled the switchman, who evidently held the Sully combination in no high regard.

"Which way do the trains go for Corinto?"

"That way. That track runs right through without a break. It's a single track road all the way."

"Thank you."

"Going to hit the ties?"

"I'm likely to before I get there," laughed Phil, again thanking his informant and starting away, for he saw some people approaching whom he thought belonged to the show.

Leaning up against a freight car the lad considered what he had better do. At first he was inclined to try to steal a ride on the circus train, but after thinking the matter over he concluded that this would be dangerous.

"If they catch me again they surely will handle me pretty roughly, and they may throw me off the train. A few knocks more or less might not make much difference, but I am not anxious to be thrown from a rapidly moving circus train. I guess I'll walk. Let me see, tomorrow will be Sunday, and it is fifty miles to Corinto. I should be able to make the town by tomorrow night sometime. Yes, I'll try it."

Having formed this resolve, Phil started manfully off for his long walk to Corinto. He did not stop to consider that he would be hungry before he got there.

He left the yards, for these were now full of employees busily engaged in loading the cars. Off near the outskirts of the town he turned back to the tracks.

For two hours he plodded along cheerfully, but by this time the rough traveling over the ties so hurt his feet, clad as they were in light slippers, that he could scarcely walk. Phil took off the slippers and trotted about in the damp grass at the side of the railroad track, until getting some relief, then started on again.

An hour later the first of the circus trains thundered by him. He could see the dim lights in the sleepers, and now and then he made out the figure of a man stretched out under a cage on a flat car.

"Anyway, I would rather be walking than locked up in that narrow linen closet," decided the Circus Boy philosophically, once more taking up his weary journey.

At sunrise Phil found that he was too tired to go much further without taking a rest, so, as soon as he found a wooded place, he climbed a fence and lay down in the shade of the trees, where he quickly went to sleep.

The afternoon was well along when finally he awakened, sore and stiff in every joint.

"If I should try to ride a bareback horse now I should fall off for sure," he moaned, rubbing his lame spots vigorously. "My, but I am hungry! I wonder how far I am from Corinto?"

A mile post a little further along told him that he had covered just twenty miles of his journey. He still had thirty miles to go—a long distance for one in his condition.

All during the rest of the day Phil was obliged to take frequent rests. Whenever he came to a stream he would halt and thrusting his feet into the cooling water, keep them there for some time. This helped him considerably, for his feet were swollen and feverish. The sun beating down on his head made him dizzy and faint, which was

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made the more disturbing because of his empty stomach.

He managed, just before sunset, to get a sandwich at a farmhouse, though he was looked upon with suspicion by the housewife who gave him the food. Phil offered to do something to pay for the slender meal, but the woman refused and bade him be on his way.

"I don't blame her. I must be a tough looking customer," grinned the boy, again climbing the fence and starting along the track. He fought shy of villages during daylight, fearing that he might be arrested for vagrancy and locked up. That would defeat his plans.

"I simply must get to Corinto and warn Mr. Sparling," he gritted. "He doesn't know the plans these people have to harm him. If it were not for that I wouldn't try to go any further today. I could get somebody to help me out for a day or so, until I could write to Mr. Sparling."

Now and then he met a tramp or two, but none that he thought looked any more disreputable than he himself did. He passed the time of day pleasantly, with such, and continued on his way.

Late in the evening he once more lay down for a rest. But Phil did not permit himself to sleep long. He feared he should not be able to wake up until morning if he did, and then he never would reach the show town in time to warn Mr. Sparling of the impending danger.

At daylight he was still ten miles from his destination.

"I must make it. I shall make it!" he breathed, starting on a run, having found a path at the side of the track.

However, he could not keep this up for long, and was soon obliged to settle back into his former slow pace.

At last Phil came in sight of the church spires of a town.

"I believe that is Corinto," he said, shading his eyes and peering off at the distant town. "At any rate I can't be far from it now."

The knowledge was almost as good as a meal. Its effect on Phil Forrest was magical. He forgot all about his tender feet and empty stomach as he swung into a good strong pace.

All at once he halted and listened. The blare of the big horns of a circus band reached his ears.

"The parade has started. I must hurry now. The Sully wretches may do something to the parade," Phil cried, starting away on a run. Nor did he slacken his pace until he had gotten well into the town. Now he could hear two bands playing, and knew that the rival parades were under way.

"Where is the circus lot—where is the parade," he asked a man as he dashed by.

The man pointed off to the right and Phil took the next corner with a rush. As he swung into that street he saw the banners of the Sparling show fluttering in the breeze as the parade moved majestically toward him. Taking to the street, for the sidewalks were crowded, Phil ran with all speed. Mr. Sparling, in his carriage at the head, saw him coming. At first he did not recognize the lad; then all at once he discovered who the boy was.

Phil dashed up to the carriage. Mr. Sparling reached out a hand and pulled him in.

"Phil!" he cried.

"Quick, get the tents guarded! Sully's gang are going to cut the guy ropes. Look out for the parade too. I suspect they will try to break it up!"

CHAPTER XVI. THE BATTLE OF THE ELEPHANTS

"What!"

"Yes, hurry!" and Phil sank back, weak from lack of food and the severe strain he had put upon himself.

Mr. Sparling grasped the meaning of the lad's words in a flash. Snatching a whistle from his pocket he blew two short, shrill blasts. A mounted man came riding up at a gallop.

"Go to the lot! Have the tents surrounded. Let no one through who doesn't belong to the show. I trust you to look out for our property. An attempt may be made to do us damage while we are out on parade. Now, ride!"

The man did ride. He whirled his horse and set it at a run down the line, headed toward the circus lot.

"I've got to get back there myself, Phil. Can you stand it to stay in the carriage until it reaches the lot?"

"Yes, but I don't look fit. I—"

"Sit up and look wise. The people will think you are a clown and they'll split their sides laughing. I'll talk with you later. You must have had a rough time of it."

"I have had."

Mr. Sparling jumped out of the carriage, and, ordering a rider to dismount, took the latter's horse, on which he, too, rode back to the lot with all speed.

Phil pulled himself together. Half a block further on the people, espying him, did laugh as Mr. Sparling had said they would.

Phil grinned out of sheer sympathy.

"I must look funny riding in this fine carriage with four white horses drawing me through the streets. I don't blame them for laughing. If I had something to eat, now, I would be all right. I am getting to have as much of an appetite as Teddy Tucker has. I—"

Phil paused, listening intently.

"I hear another band and it is coming nearer," he exclaimed. "That must be the Sully show. I forgot in my excitement, to ask Mr. Sparling about them. I wonder where they are?"

The music of the rival band grew louder and louder, but strain his eyes and ears as he would, Phil was unable to locate the other show's line of parade.

"Where's that band?" he called up to the driver of his carriage.

"Off that side of the town, I guess," he answered, waving his whip to the right of them.

"Well, I think they are pretty close to us and I don't like the looks, or rather the sound of things."

At that moment Phil's carriage was drawn across an intersecting street. He looked up the street quickly.

"There they are!" he cried.

Less than a quarter of a block up the street he saw the other parade sweeping down upon them, bands playing, flags flying and banners waving. Phil's quick, practiced eyes saw something else too. The elephants were leading the rival parade, with horsemen immediately at their rear, the band still further back.

This being so unusual in a parade, the Circus Boy knew that there must be some reason for the peculiar formation. The elephants should have been further back in the line, the same as were those of the Sparling show.

Phil divined the truth instantly.

"They're going to break up our parade!" he cried. "That's what they are hoping to do. Drive on! I'm going to get out and run back to tell the parade manager. They'll do us a lot of damage."

Phil leaped from the carriage and ran down the street, his coat wide open showing his pink riding shirt beneath it.

"Where's the parade manager?" he cried.

"Gone to the lot. Boss sent him back."

Phil groaned. Something must be done and done quickly. The rival parade must be nearing their street by this time.

A thought occurred to him. Phil dashed for the elephant herd.

"Mr. Kennedy!"

"Yes?"

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"Sully's show is going to run into us at that corner there."

"They don't dare!"

"They do and they will. Swing your elephants out of line and throw them across that intersecting street. I'll bet they won't get by our bulls in a hurry."

"Great! Great, kid! I'd never thought of that."

"You'll have to hurry. The other fellows are almost here and their elephants are leading the parade. Sully's just looking for trouble!"

The voice of the elephant trainer uttered a series of shrill commands that sounded like so many explosions. The elephants understood. They swung quickly out of line and went lumbering down the street.

"Hey, there, that you, Phil?"

It was Teddy on old Emperor's back in the same frog costume that he had worn for that purpose the first season with the show.

"Yes, what's left of me," answered Phil, running fast to keep up with the swiftly moving elephants.

Just before reaching the intersecting street he managed to get ahead of Kennedy and his charges.

"Hurry, hurry! They're right here," howled the Circus Boy.

The trainer, with prod and voice, urged the elephants into even quicker action than before. Two minutes later they swung across the street down which the rival parade was coming, and, at the command of their keeper, the huge animals turned, facing the other body of paraders.

"We're just in time! There they are!" cried Phil excitedly.

"I should say so. They were going to do what you said they would, the scoundrels!"

"Can you hold them till our people get by, do you think?"

"Can I hold them? I can hold them till all the mill ponds in Canada freeze up!" exploded the elephant trainer.

Phil walked forward to meet the Sully parade. The owner of that show was well up toward the front of the line on horseback.

"You'll have to wait till our line gets by, sir," announced Phil, with a suggestive grin. "We've got your little game blocked, you see."

"You!"

Sully fairly hurled the word at the disreputable looking Circus Boy.

"Yes; you see I got away. Are you going to stop?"

"No, not for any outfit that James Sparling runs. Where is he? Afraid to come out and show himself, eh? Sends a runaway kid out to speak for him. Get out of the way, or I'll run you down!"

Phil's eyes snapped.

"You had better not try it, if you know what's good for you!"

"Move on! Break through their line!" commanded Sully.

Phil turned and waved his hand.

"They are going to try to break through, Mr. Kennedy," he called.

Kennedy uttered several quick commands. The Sully elephants swung down toward him, their trunks raised high in the air. The leader, a big tusker, uttered a shrill cry.

It was the elephants' battle cry, but Phil did not know it. Kennedy did.

For the first time, thus far, the Sparling herd of elephants began to show signs of excitement. Their trainer quieted them somewhat with soothing words here, a sharp command there, and occasionally a prod of the hook.

All at once the leading tusker of the Sully herd lunged straight at old Emperor. In another instant nearly every elephant in each herd had chosen an opponent and the battle was on in earnest.

Trumpetings, loud shrieks of rage and mighty coughs made the more timid of the people flee to places of greater safety.

As the crash of the meeting elephants came, Phil ran back to the street where his own parade was standing.

"Move on!" he shouted. "Follow your route without the elephants. And you, bandmaster, keep your men playing. When you have gone by, we will give the other show a chance to go on if there's enough left of them to do so."

Realizing that Phil had given them sensible advice, the Sparling show moved on with band playing and colors waving, but above the uproar could be heard the thunder of the fighting elephants.

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Two of the rival show's elephants had been tumbled into a ditch by the roadside. Then Kennedy had a lively few minutes to keep his own animals from following and putting an end to the enemies they had tumbled over.

The tusks of the two big elephants, when they met, sounded like the report of a pistol. Such sledge hammer blows as these two monsters dealt each other made the spectators of the remarkable battle gasp.

All at once they saw something else that made them stare the harder.

On the back of Emperor, lying prone was stretched a strange figure. From it they saw the head of a boy emerge. Slowly the frog costume that he had worn, slipped from him and dropped to the ground.

"Teddy!" shouted Phil. "He'll be killed!"

"W-o-w!" howled Teddy Tucker, who had been so frightened in the beginning that he could not get down, and now he could not if he would.

"Let go and jump off! I'll catch you!" shouted Phil.

"I—I can't."

"Mr. Kennedy, can't you get him off?"

But the trainer had his hands more than full keeping his charges in line, for at all hazards they must not be allowed to get away from him, as in their present excited state there was no telling what harm they might do.

The Sparling people suddenly uttered a great shout. Emperor was slowly forcing his antagonist backward, the Sully elephant gradually giving ground before the mighty onslaught of old Emperor. Seeing their leader weakening, the other elephants also began retreating until the line was slowly forced back against Sully's line of march. The owner was riding up and down in a frightful rage, alternately urging his trainer to rally his elephants, and hurling threats at Phil Forrest and the organization he represented.

"Had we better not call our bulls off, Mr. Kennedy?" shouted Phil. "Our parade has gone by this time."

"Yes, if I can. I don't know whether I can stop them now or not."

"You get the others away. I'll try to take care of Emperor and Jupiter. Emperor will give in shortly, after he knows the other elephant is whipped."

"He won't give in till he kills him," answered Kennedy. "Better look out. He's blind, crazy mad."

"I'm not afraid of him. Hang on now, Teddy. We will have you out of your difficulty in a few minutes."

Teddy had been hanging on desperately, his eyes large and staring. Every time the long trunk of Sully's big tusker was raised in the air, Teddy thought it was being aimed at his head and shrank closer to Emperor's back. But the tusker probably never saw Teddy at all. He was too busy protecting himself from old Emperor's vicious thrusts.

At last the tusker began to retreat in earnest. First he would turn, running back a few rods; then he would whirl to give a moment's battle to Emperor.

Emperor was following him doggedly.

Phil decided that it was time to act. He rushed up to Emperor's head during one of these lulls and called commandingly.

Emperor, with a sweep of his trunk, hurled Phil Forrest to the side of the street. But Phil, though shaken up a bit, was not harmed in the least.

He was up and at his huge friend almost at once.

"Emperor! Emperor!" he shouted, getting nearer and nearer to the head of the enraged beast.

Finally Phil stepped up boldly and threw both arms about Emperor's trunk.

"Steady, steady, Emperor!" he commanded.

This time the elephant did not hurl Phil away. Instead, he stopped hesitatingly, evidently not certain whether he should plunge on after his enemy or obey the command of his little friend.

Phil tucked the trunk under his arm confidently.

"That's a good fellow! Come along now, and we'll have a whole bag of peanuts when we get back to the lot."

The elephant coughed understandingly, it seemed. At least he turned about, though with evident reluctance, and meekly followed the Circus Boy, his trunk still tucked under the latter's arm.

The Sully elephants had been whipped and driven off, though none had been very seriously injured. Some fences had been knocked over and a number of people nearly frightened to death—but that was all. Phil had saved the day for his employer's show and had come out victorious.

The Circus Boy was in high glee as he led Emperor back toward the lot, where the parade was drawing in by

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the time he reached there.

Teddy, on the big elephant's head, was waving his arms excitedly.

"We licked 'em! We licked 'em!" he howled, as he caught sight of Mr. Sparling hurrying toward them.

CHAPTER XVII. MONKEYS IN THE AIR

As the result of that victory, the Sparling shows did a great business in Corinto. The owner, considering that his rival had been severely enough punished, made no further effort to have him brought to justice, though Phil could hardly restrain him from making Sully suffer for the indignities he had heaped on young Forrest.

Phil found his money that day when he removed his ring shirt. The string that had fastened his money bag about his neck had parted, letting the bag drop. This money he handed to Mr. Sparling as rightfully belonging to him.

Of course the showman refused it, and wanted to make Phil a present besides, for the great service he had rendered. As it chanced, one of Mr. Sparling's own staff was attending the Sully show when Phil made his escape, and much of the latter's discomfort might have been prevented had he only been aware of that fact.

Teddy assumed the full credit for the victory of old Emperor, and no one took the trouble to argue the question with him.

Soon after these exciting incidents the Sparling shows left Canada behind and crossed the Niagara River. It was with a long drawn sigh of relief that they set eyes on the Stars and Stripes again.

After showing at the Falls, the outfit headed southwest. The season was getting late, the cotton crop in the south was going to market, and it was time for all well managed shows whose route lay that way to get into Dixie Land. The Circus Boys, too, were anxious to tour the sunny south again. This time they were going to follow a route they had never been over before, something that was still a matter of great interest to the boys.

Mr. Sparling upon learning that there was a traitor in his camp who was supplying secret information to the Sully show as to the route of the Sparling circus, had at once set a watch for the offender. It was not long before the traitor was caught red-handed. He was, of course, dismissed immediately, despised by all who knew what he had been doing.

No more had been seen of the Sully Hippodrome Circus after the meeting of the two organizations in Corinto, though that crowd had been heard of occasionally as hovering on the flanks of the Sparling shows.

"I don't care where they go," said Mr. Sparling, "so long as they don't get in the same county with me. I am liable to lose my temper if they get that near to me again, and then something will happen for sure."

The Sparling show got into the real southland when it made Memphis, Tennessee, on October first, a beautiful balmy southern fall day. All season Phil had been keeping up his practice on the trapeze bar, until he had become a really fine performer. He had never performed in public, however, and hardly thought he would have a chance to do so that season. He hoped not, if it were to be at some other performer's expense, as had usually been the case.

"When somebody gets hurt it's Phillip who takes his place," said the lad to himself.

"Which means that you are always on the job," replied Mr. Sparling who had chanced to overhear the remark. No serious accidents had occurred in sometime, however, and it was hoped by everyone that none would. Accidents, while they are accepted by show people in the most matter-of-fact way, always cast a gloom over the show. Even the loss of a horse will make the sympathetic showman sad.

After a splendid business in Memphis the show ran into Mississippi where it played a one day stand at Clarksdale, and where the showmen experienced the liveliest time they had had since they met the Sully organization in Canada.

The afternoon performance had just come to an end, and the people were getting ready to leave their seats under the big top, when a great commotion was heard under the menagerie top.

Most of the performers were in the dressing tent, changing their dress for supper, but a roar from the audience, followed by shouts of laughter, attracted their attention sharply, and as soon as they could clothe themselves sufficiently, the performers rushed out into the ring again.

Suddenly the people, upon looking toward the menagerie tent, saw a troop of diminutive animals sweeping into the big top. At first the people did not recognize them.

"They're monkeys!" shouted someone. "They're going to give us a monkey show."

"No. The beasts have gotten out of their cage," answered another.

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He was right. A careless attendant had hooked the padlock of the monkey cage in the staple, but had not locked it. An observant simian had noticed this, but did not make use of his knowledge until the keeper had gone away.

Peering out to make sure that no one was looking, the monkey reached out its hand and deftly slipped the padlock from its place.

The rest was easy. A bound against the cage door left the way open, and the hundred monkeys in the cage, big and little were not slow to take advantage of the opportunity thus offered.

Chattering wildly, they poured from the wagon like a small cataract. A moment later the attendants discovered them and gave chase. At about the same time the monkeys discovered that something was going on under the big top. Being curious little beasts, they concluded to investigate. Then, too, the attendants were pressing pretty close to them, so the whole herd bolted into the circus tent with a shouting crowd of circus men in pursuit.

The yells of the audience, added to those of the attendants, sent the nimble little fellows scurrying up ropes, center and quarter poles, all the time keeping up their merry chatter, for freedom was a thing they had not enjoyed since they had been captured in their jungle homes.

Some of the ring men tried to shake the monkeys down from the poles, just as they would shake an apple tree to get the fruit. But the little fellows were not thus easily dislodged. The attempt served only to send them higher up. They seemed to be everywhere over the heads of the people.

Finally, having thoroughly investigated the top of the tent, several of the larger simians decided to take a closer look at the audience. At the moment the audience did not know of this plan, or they might have taken measures to protect themselves.

The first intimation they had of the plans of the mischievous monkeys, was when a woman uttered a piercing shriek, startling everyone in the tent.

"What is it?" shouted someone.

"Oh, my hat! My hat!" she cried after discovering what had happened to her.

The eyes of the audience wandered from her up to where a monkey was dangling by its tail far above their heads. The animal had in its hands a flower-covered hat, so large that when the monkey tried to put it on, it almost entirely concealed his body. So suddenly had the hat been torn from the head of the owner that hatpins were broken short off while the little thief "shinned" a rope with his prize.

Failing to make the hat fit, Mr. Monkey began pulling the flowers out; then picking them to pieces, he showered the particles down over the heads of the audience.

This was great sport for the monkey, but no fun at all for the owner of the hat. The woman hurried from her seat, red-faced and humiliated. Phil Forrest had chanced to be a witness to the act. He stepped forward as she descended to the concourse and touched his hat.

"Was the hat a valuable one, madam?" he asked.

"Very."

"I am sorry. If you will come with me to the office of the manager I am quite sure he will make good your loss."

"Do you belong to the circus, sir?"

"I do."

The woman gladly accompanied him to Mr. Sparling, and there was made happy by having the price of her ruined hat handed over to her without a word of objection.

In the meantime trouble had been multiplying at a very rapid rate under the big top. Everyone was shouting, attendants were yelling orders to each other, and now Mr. Sparling, hurrying in, added his voice to the din.

Hats in all parts of the tent seemed to fly toward the roof almost magically, to come tumbling down a few minutes later hopeless wrecks.

Once the monkeys got a tall silk hat. This they used for an aerial football, tossing it to each other as they leaped from rope to rope at their dizzy height.

One monkey was discovered peering down at a certain point in the audience with an almost fascinated gaze. Something down there attracted him. Cautiously the little fellow let himself down a rope to the side wall, then, unnoticed by the people, crept down through the aisle. Slowly one black little hand reached up and jerked from the head of an old gentleman a pair of gold spectacles.

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The man uttered a yell as he felt the spectacles being torn from him, and made a frantic effort to save them. But the glasses, in the hands of the monkey, were already halfway up the aisle and a moment more the monkey was twisting the bows into hard knots and hurling pieces of glass at the spectators.

"Catch them! Catch them!" shouted Mr. Sparling.

"How, how?" answered a showman.

"Somebody—"

"I'll go up and get them," spoke up Teddy Tucker. Teddy simply could not keep out of trouble. He was sure to be in the thick of it whenever a disturbance was abroad.

"That's a good plan. How are you going to do it?"

"I'll show you. I'll shake 'em down if you will catch them when they reach the ring."

"Yes, but be careful that you don't fall."

"Don't you worry about me!"

Teddy untied a rope from a quarter pole, straightened it out and throwing off his coat and hat, began going up the rope hand over hand. The monkeys peered down curiously from their perches, chattering and discussing the little figure that was on its way up to join them.

Teddy reached the platform of the trapeze performers. From there he climbed a short rope that led to a smaller trapeze bar higher up, thence to the aerial bars, where the whole bunch of monkeys were sitting, scolding loudly.

"Shoo!" said Teddy. "Get out of here! Better get a net and catch them down there," shouted Teddy, standing up on the bars without apparent thought of his own danger.

"Look out that we don't have to catch you!" called Mr. Sparling warningly.

Teddy picked his way gingerly across the bars shooing the monkeys ahead of him, now holding to a guide rope so that he might not by any chance slip through and drop to the ring forty feet below him, and all the while waving his free hand to frighten the monkeys.

A few of them leaped to a rope some eight or ten feet away, down which they went to the ring and up another set of ropes before the show people below could catch them.

While Teddy was thus engaged, the whole troop of monkeys swung back on the under side of the aerial bars beneath his feet.

"Shoo! Shoo!" he shouted. "You rascals, I'll fix you when I get hold of you, and don't you forget that for a minute."

He turned, cautiously making his way back, when the lively, mischievous little fellows shinned up the rope by which he had let himself down to the aerial bars.

"I'll drive you all over the top of this tent, but I'll get you," Teddy cried.

Down below the audience was shouting and jeering. The people refused to leave the tent so long as such an exhibition was going on. No one paid the least attention to the "grand concert" that was in progress at one end of the big top, so interested were all in the Circus Boy's giddy chase.

"I'm afraid he will fall and kill himself," groaned Mr. Sparling.

"You can't hurt Teddy," laughed Phil. "He can go almost anywhere that a monkey could climb. But he'll never get them." Phil was laughing with the others, for the sight was really a funny one.

"Oh, look what they've done!" exclaimed one of the performers.

"They've pulled up the rope," said Mr. Sparling hopelessly.

"Now he certainly is in a fix," laughed Phil.

The monkeys, after shinning the rope, had mischievously hauled it up after them, acting with almost human intelligence. One of them carried the free end of it off to one side and dropped it over a guy rope. This left Tucker high and dry on the aerial bars with no means at hand to enable him to get back to earth.

The audience caught the significance of it and howled lustily.

"Now, I should like to know how you are going to get down?" shouted Mr. Sparling.

Teddy looked about him questioningly, and off at the grinning monkeys, that perched on rope and trapeze, appeared to be enjoying his discomfiture to the full.

"I—I guess I'll have to do the world's record high dive!" he called down. There seemed no other way out of it.

CHAPTER XVIII. TEDDY TAXES A DROP

"Throw him a rope!" shouted someone.

"Yes, give him a rope," urged Mr. Sparling.

"No one can throw a rope that high," answered Phil. "I think the first thing to be done is to get the monkeys and I have a plan by which to accomplish it."

"What's your plan?"

"Have their cage brought in. We should have thought of that before."

"That's a good idea," nodded Mr. Sparling. "I always have said you had more head than any of the others of this outfit, not excepting myself. Get the monkey cage in here."

While this was being done Phil hurried out into the menagerie tent, where, at a snack stand, he filled his pockets with peanuts and candy; then strolled back, awaiting the arrival of the cage.

"We shall be able to capture our monkeys much more easily if the audience will please leave the tent," announced Mr. Sparling. "The show is over. There will be nothing more to see."

The spectators thought differently. There was considerable to be seen yet. No one made a move to leave, and the manager gave up trying to make them, not caring to attempt driving the people out by force.

The cage finally was drawn up between the two rings. This instantly attracted the attention of the little beasts. Phil stood off from the cage a few feet.

"Now everybody keep away, so the monkeys can see me," he directed. Phil then began chirping in a peculiar way, giving a very good imitation of the monkey call for food. At the same time he began slowly tossing candy and peanuts into the cage.

There was instant commotion aloft. Such a chattering and scurrying occurred up there as to cause the spectators to gaze in open-mouthed wonder. But still Phil kept up his weird chirping, continuing to toss peanuts and candy into the cage.

"As I live, they are coming down," breathed Mr. Sparling in amazement, "never saw anything like it in my life!"

"I always told you that boy should have been a menagerie man instead of a ring performer," nodded Mr. Kennedy, the elephant trainer.

"He is everything at the same time," answered Mr. Sparling. "It is a question as to whether or not he does one thing better than another. There they come. Everybody stand back. I hope the people keep quiet until he gets through there. I am afraid the monkeys never will go back into the cage, though."

There was no hesitancy on the part of the monkeys. They began leaping from rope to rope, swinging by their tails to facilitate their descent, until finally the whole troop leaped to the top of the cage and swung themselves down the bars to the ground.

Phil lowered his voice to a low, insistent chirp. One monkey leaped into the cage, the others following as fast as they could stretch up their hands and grab the tail board of the wagon. Instantly they began scrambling for the nuts and candies that lay strewn over the floor.

The last one was inside. Phil sprang to the rear of the cage and slammed the door shut, throwing the padlock in place and snapping it.

"There are your old monkeys," he cried, turning to Mr. Sparling with flushed, triumphant face.

The audience broke out into a roar, shouting, howling and stamping on the seats at the same time.

"Now, you may go," shouted Mr. Sparling to the audience. "Phil, you are a wonder. I take off my hat to you," and the showman, suiting the action to the word, made a sweeping bow to the little Circus Boy.

Still the audience remained.

"Well, why don't you go?"

"What about the kid up there near the top of the house?" questioned a voice in the audience.

"That's so. I had forgotten all about him," admitted the owner of the show.

"Oh, never mind me. I'm only a human being," jeered Tucker, from his perch far up near the top of the tent. This brought a roar of laughter from everybody.

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"We shall have to try to cast a rope up to him."

"You can't do it," answered Phil firmly. Nevertheless the effort was made, Teddy watching the attempts with lazy interest.

"No, we shan't be able to reach him that way," agreed Mr. Sparling finally.

"Hey down there," called Teddy.

"Well, what is it? Got something to suggest?"

"Maybe—maybe if you'd throw some peanuts and candy in my cage I might come down."

This brought a howl of laughter.

"I don't see how we are going to make it," said Mr. Sparling, shaking his head hopelessly.

"I'll tell you how we can do it," said Phil.

"Yes; I was waiting for you to make a suggestion. I thought it funny if you didn't have some plan in that young head of yours. What is it?"

"What's the matter with the balloon?"

"The balloon?"

"Yes."

"Hurrah! That's the very thing."

The balloon was a new act in the Sparling show that season. A huge balloon had been rigged, but in place of the usual basket, was a broad platform. Onto this, as the closing act of the show, a woman rode a horse, then the balloon was allowed to rise slowly to the very dome of the big tent, carrying the rider and horse with it.

The act was a decided novelty, and was almost as great a hit as had been the somersaulting automobile of a season before.

The balloon stood swaying easily at its anchorage.

"Give a hand here, men. Let the bag up and the boy can get on the platform, after which you can pull him down."

"That won't do," spoke up Phil. "He can't reach the platform. Someone will have to go up and toss him a rope. He can make the rope fast and slide down it."

"I guess you are right, at that. Who will go up?"

"I will," answered the Circus Boy. "Give me that coil of rope."

Taking his place on the platform the lad rose slowly toward the top of the tent as the men paid out the anchor rope.

"Halt!" shouted Phil when he found himself directly opposite his companion.

"Think you can catch it, Teddy?"

"Yep."

"Well, here goes."

The rope shot over Teddy's head, landing in his outstretched arm.

"Be sure you make it good and fast before you try to shin down it," warned Phil.

"I'll take care of that. Don't you worry. You might toss me a peanut while I'm getting ready. I'll go in my cage quicker."

Phil laughingly threw a handful toward his companion, three or four of which Teddy caught, some in his mouth and some in his free hand, to the great amusement of the spectators.

"They ought to pay an admission for that," grinned Phil.

"For what?"

"For seeing the animals perform. You are the funniest animal in the show at the present minute."

"Well, I like that! How about yourself?" peered Teddy with well-feigned indignation.

"I guess I must be next as an attraction," laughed the boy.

"I guess, yes."

"Haul away," called Phil to the men below him, and they started to pull the balloon down toward the ground again.

"Get a net under Tucker there," directed Mr. Sparling.

"I'm not going to dive. What do you think?" retorted Teddy.

"There is no telling what you may or may not do," answered the showman. "It is the unexpected that always

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happens with you."

Phil nodded his approval of the statement.

In the meantime Teddy had made fast the end of the rope to the aerial bar, and grasping the rope firmly in his hands, began letting himself down hand under hand.

"Better twist your legs about the rope," called Phil.

"No. It isn't neces—"

Just then Teddy uttered a howl. The rope, which he had not properly secured, suddenly slipped from the bar overhead.

Teddy dropped like a shot.

CHAPTER XIX. THE CIRCUS ON AN ISLAND

Teddy landed in the net with a smack that made the spectators gasp.

"Are you hurt," cried Mr. Sparling, running forward.

Teddy got up, rubbing his shins gingerly, working his head from side to side to make sure that his neck was properly in place.

"N—n—no, I guess not. I'll bet that net got a clump that it won't forget in a hurry, though. Folks, the show is all over. You may go home now," added Teddy, turning to the audience and waving his hand to them.

The seats began to rattle as the people, realizing that there was nothing more to be seen, finally decided to start for home.

"It is lucky, young man, that I had that net under you," announced Mr. Sparling.

"Lucky for me, but a sad blow to the net," answered Teddy humorously, whereat Mr. Sparling shook his head hopelessly.

The tent was beginning to darken and the showman glanced up apprehensively.

"What's the outlook?" he asked as Mr. Kennedy passed.

"Just a shower, I guess."

The owner strode to the side wall and peered out under the tent, then crawled out for a survey of the skies.

"We are in for a lively storm," he declared. "It may not break until late tonight, and I hardly think it will before then. Please tell the director to cut short all the acts tonight. I want every stick and stitch off the lot no later than eleven o'clock tonight."

"Shall we cut out the Grand Entry?"

"Yes, by all means. If possible I should like to make the next town before the storm breaks, as it's liable to be a long, wet one."

"I don't care. I've got a rubber coat and a pair of rubber boots with a hole in one of them," spoke up Teddy.

"And, Teddy Tucker," added the owner, turning to the Circus Boy. "If you mix things up tonight, and delay us a minute anywhere, I'll fire you. Understand?"

Teddy shook his head.

"You don't? Well, I'll see if I can make it plainer then."

"Why, Mr. Sparling, you wouldn't discharge me, now, would you? Don't you know this show couldn't get along without me?"

The showman gazed sternly at Teddy for a moment, then his face broke out in a broad smile.

"I guess you're right at that, my boy."

The cook tent came down without delay that afternoon, and on account of the darkness the gasoline lamps had to be lighted a full two hours earlier than usual.

The show at the evening performance was pushed forward with a rush, while many anxious eyes were upon the skies, for it was believed that the heaviest rainstorm in years was about to fall.

By dint of much hard work, together with a great deal of shouting and racket, the tents were off the field by the time indicated by Mr. Sparling, and loaded. A quick start was made. Long before morning the little border town of Tarbert, their next stand, was reached.

Mr. Sparling had all hands out at once.

"Get to the lot and pitch your tents. Everything has got to be up before daylight," he ordered. "You'll have something to eat just as soon as you get the cook tent in place."

That was inducement enough to make the men work with a will, and they did. The menagerie and circus tents had been laced together, lying flat on the ground, when the storm broke.

"That will keep the lot dry, but hustle it! Get the canvas up before it is so soaked you can't raise it," commanded the owner.

By daylight the tents were in place, though men had to be stationed constantly at the guy ropes to loosen them as they strained tight from the moisture they absorbed.

The rain seemed to be coming down in sheets. Fortunately the lot chosen for pitching the tents was on a strip

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of ground higher than anything about it, so the footing remained fairly solid. But it was a cheerless outlook. The performers, with their rubber boots on, came splashing through a sea of mud and water on their way to the cook tent that morning, Phil and Teddy with the rest.

"Looks like rain, doesn't it," greeted Teddy, as he espied Mr. Sparling plodding about with a keen eye to the safety of his tents.

"I wish the outlook for business today were as good," was the comprehensive answer.

When the hour for starting the parade arrived, the water over the flats about them was so deep and the mud so soft that it was decided to abandon the parade for that day.

"I almost wish we hadn't unloaded," said the owner. "It looks to me as if we might be tied up here for sometime."

"Yes," agreed Phil. "The next question is how are the people going to get here to see the show?"

"I was thinking of that myself. The answer is easy, though."

"What—"

"They won't come."

"Why? Are they drowned out?"

"No; the town is high enough so they will not suffer much of any damage, except as the water gets into their cellars. No; they are all right. I wish we were as much so, but there'll be no use in giving a show this afternoon."

"Wait a minute," spoke up Phil, raising one hand while he considered briefly.

"Of course, you have an idea. It wouldn't be you if you hadn't. But I am afraid that, this time, you will fall short of the mark."

"No, not if you will let me carry out a little plan."

"What is it?"

"When I came over I noticed a strip of ground just a few rods to the north of the lot, and running right into it, that was higher than the flats. It was a sort of ridge and fairly level on top."

"I didn't see that."

"I did. It was showing above the water a few inches and looked like hard ground. If you don't mind getting wet I'll take you over and point it out."

The showman agreed, though as yet he did not understand what Phil's plan was.

Phil led the way to the north side of the lot, then turning sharply to the left after getting his bearings, walked confidently out into the water followed by Mr. Sparling. The ground felt firm beneath their feet. As a matter of fact it was a stratum of rock running out from the nearby mountains.

"Boy, you've struck a way for us to get out when time comes for us to do so. That mud on the flats will be so soft, for several days, that the wheels would sink in up to the hubs. The stock would get mired now, were they to try to go through."

"But not here."

"No; I rather think that's so. What's your plan?"

"We have plenty of wagons that are not in use—take for instance the pole wagons. Why not send our wagons over to the village and bring the people here? I am sure they will enjoy that," suggested Phil.

"Splendid," glowed the showman. "But I'm afraid the horses never would be able to pull them over."

"Think not?"

"I said I was afraid they would not be able to."

"I had considered that, sir."

"Oh, you had?"

"Yes."

"Of course, I might have known you had. Well, what is it?"

"I have an even better scheme, and it will be great advertising— one that few people in town will be able to resist."

"Yes? I am listening."

"Well, in the first place, have the long pole wagons fixed up to bring the people over. We can use our ring platforms to make a bottom for the passengers to sit on."

"Yes, that will be easy."

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"Then, take some side wall poles, stand them up along the sides of the wagon and build a roof with canvas. That will keep the inside of the wagon as dry as a barn."

"A splendid idea. But how are you going to get the folks over here after you have done that?"

"Wait, I am coming to that. What do you say to hitching the elephants to the wagons and hauling the people back and forth? Nothing like that has ever been done, has it?"

Mr. Sparling tossed up his hat regardless of the fact that the rain was beating down on his head and running down his neck.

"Nothing ever been done to compare with it, since P. T. Barnum ploughed up his farm with Jumbo. By the great Dan Rice, that's a scheme!" shouted Mr. Sparling enthusiastically.

"But you will have to hurry if you are going to put the plan into operation," urged Phil.

"What would you suggest, Phil?"

"I would suggest that you send men into town on horseback, right away, having them call at every house, at the post office, the hotel and every other place they can think of, telling the people what we propose to do. Teddy and I will take horses and go out with the rest, if you say so. The rain won't hurt us, and besides, it will be great fun. What do you say, sir?"

Mr. Sparling hesitated for one brief second.

"Come on!" he shouted as with hat in hand he splashed toward the lot followed a short distance behind by Phil.

The arrangements suggested by the Circus Boy were quickly made, and a company of horsemen rode over to the village to tell the people how they might see the show without getting wet. While this was being done the pole wagons were being rigged for the purpose, and the elephants were provided with harness strong enough to stand the strain of the heavy loads they would have to draw.

The wagons were to be driven along the village streets at one o'clock, the circus to begin at half-past two. That would give the show people plenty of time to prepare for the performance.

The suggestion met with great enthusiasm. Few people had ever had the privilege of riding behind an elephant team, and they gladly welcomed the opportunity.

At Phil's further suggestion a separate wagon had been prepared for the colored people. When all was ready the elephants were first driven across the ridge without their wagons, to show the animals that the footing was safe. Then they were hooked to the covered pole wagons and the work of transporting the village to the lot was begun.

The show grounds were on an island, now, entirely surrounded by water. Some of the clowns had rigged up fishing outfits and sat on the bank in the rain trying to catch fish, though there probably was not a fish within a mile of them, according to Phil's idea.

"That's good work for a fool," gloated Teddy.

"It takes a wise man to be a fool, young man," was the clown's retort.

"Perhaps you don't know that the river has overflowed a few miles above here, and that this place is full of fish?"

"No; I don't know anything of the sort. The only water I see coming is from right overhead. Maybe there's fish swimming around up there; I don't know. Never caught any up there myself."

After a time the clowns tired of their sport and went back to their dressing tent to prepare for the afternoon performance, the only performance that would be given that day, as it would not be safe to try to transport the people across the water in the dark. And, besides, the owner of the show hoped to be able to get his show aboard the cars before night.

In the big top a slender rope had been stretched across the blue seats from the arena back to the sidewall. This was the "color line." On one side of it sat the colored people, on the other the white people.

After all were seated, however, the line was taken down and colored and white people sat elbow to elbow. All were perfectly satisfied, for the color line had been drawn. The rest did not matter.

The show people entered into the spirit of the unusual exhibition with the keenest zest, and the Sparling show had never given a better entertainment than it did that afternoon. The clowns, even though they had not been successful as fishermen, were wholly so when they entered the ring. Teddy and his donkey, which he had named January, after the manner of most clowns who own these animals, set the whole tent roaring, while Shivers and

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his "shadow" made a hit from the moment they entered.

"I've got the greatest bunch of people to be found in this country," confided Mr. Sparling proudly to the surgeon.

"Especially those two boys, eh?"

"Yes. They can't be beaten. Neither can a lot of the others."

A fair-sized house had been brought over to see the show, and after the performance was ended they were taken back to their homes in the pole wagons, as they had been brought over.

"I'll tell you what you ought to do," said Teddy confidentially, just before the show closed.

"Well, what is it?" questioned Mr. Sparling.

"You ought to leave those folks here."

"Leave them here?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Why, they couldn't get back, and they would have to go to the evening performance again. You'd get 'em going and coming then. Do you see?"

The showman tipped back his head, laughing long and loud.

"Yes; I see."

"Then why not do it?"

"Young man, this show doesn't do things that way. We do business on the square, or we don't do it at all. I admire your zeal, but not your plan."

"Yes," agreed Phil, who stood near; "I sometimes think Teddy Tucker's moral code does need bolstering up a bit."

"What's that?" questioned Teddy. "What's a moral code?"

"I'll explain it to you some other time when we are not so busy," replied Phil.

"Nor so wet," added Mr. Sparling. "You see, we want to come to this town to show again some other time."

"I don't," responded Teddy promptly. "I've had all I want of it for the rest of my natural life. I can get all the fun I want out of performing on dry ground, instead of the edge of a lake that you are expecting every minute to tumble into."

CHAPTER XX. DISASTER BEFALLS THE FAT LADY

"Help, help! Oh, help!"

"Coming," shouted Teddy Tucker, leaping from the platform of the sleeping car where he had been lounging in the morning sun.

The Fattest Woman on Earth was midway down the steep railroad embankment with the treacherous cinders slowly giving way beneath her feet, threatening every second to hurl her to the bottom of the embankment and into the muddy waters of a swollen stream that had topped its banks as the result of the storm that had disturbed the circus so much.

The Sparling shows did not succeed in getting fully away from the island until the middle of the day following the events just narrated.

This made it necessary to skip the next stand, so the show ran past that place, intent on making St. Charles, Louisiana, sometime that night.

The train had been flagged on account of a washout some distance ahead, and while it was lying on the main track many of the show people took the opportunity to drop off and gather flowers out in the fields near the tracks.

The Fat Woman was one of these. She had found it a comparatively easy thing to slide down the bank further up the tracks, after finding a spot where she could do so without danger of going right on into the creek below.

But the return journey was a different matter. She had succeeded in making her way halfway up the bank when, finding herself slipping backward she uttered her appeal for help.

"Stick your heels in and hold to it. I'll be there in a minute," shouted Teddy, doing an imitation of shooting the chutes down the embankment, digging in his own heels just in time to save himself from a ducking in the stream.

"There goes that Tucker boy, headed for more trouble," nodded a clown. "Watch him if you want to see some fun. Fat Marie is in trouble already, and she's going to get into more in about a minute."

Teddy picked himself up, and, running up behind the Fat Woman, braced his hands against her ample waist and began to push.

"Start your feet! Start your feet! Make motions as if you were walking!" shouted Teddy.

Marie did not move.

"Oh, help!" she murmured. "Help, help!"

"Go on. Go on! Do you think I can stay in this position all day, holding up your five hundred pounds? My feet are slipping back already. I'm treading water faster'n a race horse can run right this minute."

"I guess he's started something for himself all right," jeered the clown. "Told you so. Hey, there goes the whistle! The train will be starting. We'd better be making for the sleeper."

All hands sought a more suitable climbing place, hurried up the railroad embankment and ran for the train. A crowd gathered on the rear platform, where they jeered at Tucker and his burden.

"Come—come down here and help us out," howled Teddy. "You—you're a nice bunch, to run away when a lady is in trouble! Come down here, I say."

Just then the train started.

Phil, at that moment, was up forward in Mr. Sparling's car, else he would have tried to stop the train; or, failing to do that, he would have gone to his companion's assistance.

By this time Teddy had turned and was bracing his back against the Fat Woman, his heels digging into the shifting cinders in a desperate attempt to prevent the woman's slipping further down.

"You'll have to do something. I'm no Samson. I can't hold the world on my back all the time, though I can support a piece of it part of the time. Do something!"

"I—I can't," wailed the Fat Woman. "There goes the train, too. We'll be left."

"No, we won't."

"Yes, we shall."

"No; we won't be left, 'cause—'cause we're left already. Wow! I'm going! Save yourself!"

The cinders slipped from under Teddy's feet, and, with the heavy burden bearing down upon him, he was unable to get sufficient foothold to save himself.

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The result was that Teddy sat down suddenly. Fat Marie sat down on him, and Teddy's yell might have been heard a long distance away. Those on the tail end of the circus train saw the collapse, then lost sight of the couple as the train rolled around a bend in the road.

Down the bank slid the Fat Woman, using Tucker as a toboggan, with the boy yelling lustily. Faster and faster did they slide.

Suddenly they landed in the muddy stream with a mighty splash, Teddy still on the bottom of the heap. When she found herself in the water Marie struggled to get out, and Teddy quickly scrambled up, mouth, eyes and ears so full of water that he could neither see, hear nor speak for a moment. He was blowing like a porpoise and trying to swim out, but the swift current was tumbling him along so rapidly that he found himself unable to reach the bank only a few feet away.

Marie, screaming for help, floated down rapidly with the current. When finally Teddy succeeded in getting his eyes open he discovered that she had lodged against a tree across the stream, where her cries grew louder and more insistent than ever.

Teddy was swept against her with a bump. He frantically grabbed for a limb of the fallen tree. As he did so his legs were drawn under it, so that it required all his strength to pull himself up to the tree trunk.

He sat there rubbing the water out of his eyes and breathing hard.

"Quick, get me out of here or I'll drown!" moaned the Fat Woman.

"Drown, if you want to. I've got my own troubles just this minute. What did you ever get me into this mix-up for? That's what I get for trying to be a good thing—"

Marie's screams waxed louder.

"All right. If you'll only stop that yelling I'll get you on dry land somehow. Can't you pull yourself up nearer the bank?"

"No. My dress is caught on something."

Teddy peered over, and, locating the place where she was caught, tried to free her. The lad was unable to do so with one hand, so, in a thoughtless moment, he brought both hands to the task. He lost his balance and plunged into the torrent head first, his body disappearing under the log. Teddy shot to the surface on the other side, flat on his back.

The Circus Boy did not shout this time. He was too angry to do so. He turned over and struck out for the bank which he was fortunate enough to reach. Quickly clambering up, Teddy sat down to repeat his process of rubbing the water out of his eyes.

"Are you going to let me lie here and drown?" cried the Fat Woman.

"It looks that way, doesn't it, eh?"

Teddy got up and hurried to her just the same. Throwing off his wet coat he set to work with a will to get Marie out. The water was shallow and she managed to help herself somewhat, therefore after great effort Teddy succeeded in towing her to land. The woman was a sight and Teddy a close second in this respect.

"I'm drowned," she moaned as he dragged her out on the bank, letting her drop sharply.

"You only think you are. I suppose you know what we've got to do now, don't you?"

"N-n-n-no."

"We've got to walk to the next stand."

"How—how far is it?"

"Maybe a hundred miles."

"Oh, help!"

As a matter of fact they were within five miles of St. Charles, where the Sparling show was billed to exhibit that afternoon and evening.

"I'm afraid they'll miss you in the parade today, but what do you think will happen if we don't reach the show in time for the performance this afternoon?"

"I—I don't know."

"I do. We'll get fined good and proper."

"It—it's all your fault, Teddy Tucker."

Teddy surveyed her wearily.

"If you'd held me up I shouldn't have fallen in and—and—"

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"Drowned," growled Teddy.

"Yes."

"And if you hadn't sat on me I shouldn't have fallen in, and there you are. Now, get up and we'll find a place to climb up the bank. We can't stay here all day and starve to death. Come on, now."

"I—I can't."

"All right; then I'll go without you." Teddy started away, whereupon the Fat Woman wailed to him to come back, at the same time struggling to her feet, bedraggled and wet, her hair full of sand and her clothes torn.

"If they'd only start a beauty show in the side top you would take first prize," grinned the boy. "Hurry up."

Marie waddled along with great effort, making slow headway.

"We shall have to go further along before we can get up the bank. That is, unless you want to take the chance of falling into the creek again."

It was some distance to the place where the creek curved under the railroad bed, and they would be obliged to go beyond that if they expected to get the Fat Woman out without a repetition of the previous disaster.

After a while they reached the spot for which Teddy had been heading.

Marie surveyed the bank up which she must climb.

"Can you make it?"

"I—I'll try."

"That's the talk. Take a running start, but slow up before you get to the top, or with your headway you'll go right on over the other side and down that embankment. You ought to travel with a net under you, but it would have to be a mighty strong one, or you'd go through it."

Marie uttered a little hopeless moan and began climbing up the bank once more, but bracing each foot carefully before throwing her weight upon it. Teddy, in the meantime, had run up to the top where he sat down on the end of a tie watching the Fat Woman's efforts to get up to him.

"Oh, help!"

"Help, help," mimicked Teddy.

"I can't go any further, unless you come down here and push."

"Push? No thank you. I tried that before. It would take a steam engine to push you up that bank, because you'd let the engine do all the pushing. You wouldn't help yourself at all."

"I'll fall if you don't help me."

"Well, fall then. You've got a nice soft piece of grass to land on down there. I'll tell you what I'll do."

"What?"

"I'll take hold of your hand if you'll promise to let go the minute you feel you're going to fall."

"I—I don't want to let go. I want to hold on if I feel I'm going to fall," wailed Marie.

"No, you don't. 'United we stand, divided we fall,'" quoted Teddy solemnly.

"I'll promise; I'll promise anything, if you will come help me."

Teddy rose and slid down the bank to her.

"Give me your hand."

Marie extended a fat hand toward him, which he grasped firmly.

"Now gather all your strength and run for it. We'll be at the top before you know it. Run, run, run!"

The command was accompanied by a jerk on Marie's arm, and together they started plowing up the bank.

"Here we are. One more reach, and we'll be on hard ground. Then—"

"Help!" screamed Marie.

Both her feet flew out. One caught Teddy, tripping him and down they rolled amid a shower of cinders, both landing in a heap at the foot of the embankment.

"That settles it. I thought you were going to let go," growled Teddy.

"I—I couldn't."

"You mean you didn't. Now, you can take your choice; go up the bank alone or stay here. I suppose I have got to stay here with you, but I really ought to leave you. Somehow, I'm not mean enough to do it, but I want to."

Teddy stretched out on the grass in the bright sunlight to dry himself, for he was still very wet, while Marie sat down helplessly and shook out her hair.

They had been there for nearly two hours when the rails above them began to snap.

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"Guess there's a train coming. Just my luck to have it run off the track and fall on me about the time it gets here."

The sound told him the train was coming from the direction his own train had gone sometime before.

"It's a handcar," shouted the lad as a car swung around the bend and straightened out down the track.

"Oh, help," wailed the Fat Woman.

"Hey, hey!" Teddy shouted.

Someone on the handcar waved a hat and shouted back at him.

"It's Phil, it's Phil! They're coming for us, Marie," cried Teddy. "Now, you've got to climb that bank unless you want to stay here and starve to death. Let me tell you it's me for the handcar and a square meal."

Phil, hearing of his companion's misfortune, had requested Mr. Sparling to get him a handcar that he might go in search of Marie and Teddy. This had been quickly arranged, and with three Italian trackmen Phil had set out, he himself taking his turn at the handle to assist in propelling the car.

"What's happened?" shouted Phil, leaping from the car and running down the bank, falling the last half of the way and bringing up in a heap at the feet of Teddy Tucker.

"That's the way we came down, a couple of times," grinned Teddy. "Marie took a header into the creek and I went along. Got a rope?"

"Yes, there's one on the handcar. Why?"

"Marie can't get up the bank. You'll have to pull her up."

The rope was hurriedly brought, and after being fastened about her waist, the Italians were ordered to pull, while Phil and Teddy braced themselves against the Fat Woman's waist and pushed with all their might. At last they landed her, puffing and blowing and murmuring for more help, at the top of the embankment. She was quickly assisted to the handcar, when the return journey was begun.

"Next time you fall off a train, I'll bet you go to the bottom alone," growled Teddy. "The show ought to carry a derrick for you."

"Oh, help!" moaned the Fat Woman, gasping for breath as she sat dangling over the rear end of the handcar.

"We shall miss the parade, I fear," announced Phil consulting his watch.

"Well, I don't mind for myself, but I could weep that Fat Marie has to miss it," answered Teddy soberly. "I don't like to see her miss anything that comes her way."

"She doesn't, usually," grinned Phil.

After a long hard pull they succeeded in reaching the next town with their well loaded handcar. With the help of Phil and Teddy, the Fat Lady was led puffing to the circus lot. The parade had just returned and the paraders were hurrying to change their costumes, as the red flag was up on the cook tent. Mr. Sparling saw the Circus Boys and their charge approaching, and motioned them to enter his office tent.

"Where did you find them, Phil?"

"At the bottom of a railroad embankment, about five miles back, according to the mile posts."

"A couple of fine specimens you are," growled the showman. "Well, Marie, what have you to say for yourself?"

"I—I fell down the bank."

"Pshaw! What were you doing on the bank?"

"I got off to pick some flowers when the train stopped, and when I tried to get back I—I couldn't."

"Don't you know it is against the rules of the show to leave the train between stations?"

The Fat Lady nodded faintly.

"Discipline must be maintained in this show. You are fined five dollars, and the next time such a thing happens I'll discharge you. Understand?"

"Help, oh help!" murmured Marie.

Teddy was grinning and chuckling over the Fat Lady's misfortune.

"And, young man, what were you doing off the train?" asked the showman, turning sternly.

"Me? Why, I—I went to Marie's rescue."

"You did, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"I reckon it will cost you five dollars, too."

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The grin faded slowly from Teddy's face.

"You—you going to fine me?" he stammered.

"No, I'm not going to. I already have done so."

"It doesn't pay to be a hero. A hero always gets the sharp end of the stick. But who's going to pay me for the clothes I ruined?"

Mr. Sparling surveyed the boy with the suspicion of a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, kid, I reckon I shall have to buy you a new suit, at that. Marie!"

"Ye—yes, sir," responded the woman.

"Go downtown and see if you can find some new clothes that will fit you. If not buy two suits and splice them together."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir."

"Have the bill sent to me. Tucker, you do the same. But remember, discipline must be maintained in this show," warned the owner sternly.

CHAPTER XXI. ON A FLYING TRAPEZE

The lesson lasted Teddy for a few hours; then he forgot all about it. But he was made the butt of the jokes of the dressing tent for several days.

That afternoon Phil, while attending to some correspondence for Mr. Sparling, had occasion to write to a trapeze performer about booking with the Sparling show for the coming season.

"I have been thinking, Mr. Sparling," said Phil, "that I should like to perform on the flying trapeze next season. You know I have been practicing for sometime."

Mr. Sparling glanced up from his papers.

"I'm not surprised. I guess that's the only thing you haven't done in the show thus far."

"I haven't been a fat woman or a living skeleton yet," laughed Phil.

"What can you do on the bars?"

"I can do all that your performers do. Sometimes I think I might be able to do more. I can do passing leaps, two-and-a-halves, birds' nest and all that sort of thing."

"Is it possible? I had no idea you had gotten that far along."

"Yes. I have been wishing for a chance to see how I could work before an audience."

"Haven't you enough to do already?"

"Well, I suppose I have, but you know I want to get along. The season is nearly closed now, and I shall not have another opportunity before next spring, possibly. As long as you are going to engage some other performers for next year I rather thought it might be a good plan to offer myself for the work."

"Why, Phil, why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't like to."

"You can have anything in this show that you want. You know that, do you not?"

"Yes, sir," answered the Circus Boy in a low tone. "And I thank you very much."

"When do you want to go on?"

"Any time you think best. Would you prefer to have me go through a rehearsal?"

"Not necessary. You have been practicing with Mr. Prentice, the head of the trapeze troupe, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you say you are fit, I am willing to take your word for it. In view of the fact that you already have worked with the aerial people all you will have to do will be to go on. I shall enjoy seeing you do so, if you think you can stand the added work."

"I can do so easily. When shall I try it?"

"Whenever you wish."

"What do you say to trying it tonight?"

"Certainly; go on tonight, if you want to. I'll make it a point to be on hand and watch the act."

"Thank you, very much. You are more kind to me than I have any reason to expect."

"No such thing," snapped the showman. "Send Mr. Prentice to me and I will give the necessary orders."

Phil, full of pleasurable anticipation, hurried to convey the good news to Mr. Prentice. The result was that, instead of four performers appearing in the great aerial act that evening, there were five.

Phil shinned the rope to the trapeze perch, hand over hand, the muscles standing out on his arms as he made the ascent, with as much ease as he would walk to the dressing room, and perhaps even with less effort.

Phil, with perfect confidence in himself, swung out and back to give himself the momentum necessary to carry him to where Mr. Prentice was now hanging head down ready to catch him.

The catcher slapped his palms sharply together, the signal that on the return flight Phil was to let go and throw himself into the waiting arms of the other.

In a graceful, curving flight the Circus Boy landed in the iron grip of Mr. Prentice, and on the return sweep sprang lightly into the air, deftly catching his own trapeze bar which carried him to his perch.

Next he varied his performance by swinging off with his back to the catcher, being caught about the waist, then thrown back to meet his trapeze bar.

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"He's the most graceful aerial performer I ever saw on a bar," declared Mr. Sparling. "He is a wonder."

The next variation of the act was what is known as a "passing leap," where, while the catcher is throwing one performer back to his trapeze bar, a second one is flying toward the catcher, the two supple bodies passing in the air headed in opposite directions. In this case, his opposite partner was a young woman, the successor to little Zoraya who had been so severely injured earlier in the season.

"Fine, Phil!" she breathed as they passed each other, and the Circus Boy's face took on a pleased smile.

"Try a turn next time," said Mr. Prentice, as he threw Phil lightly into the air toward his trapeze. "Think you can do it?"

"I can try, at least."

Phil got a wide swing and then at a signal from the catcher, shot up into the air. He threw a quick somersault, then stretched out his hands to be caught. He was too low down for Mr. Prentice to reach him and Phil shot toward the net head first.

Though he had lost his bearings during the turn he had not lost his presence of mind.

"Turn!" shouted a voice from below, the watchful ringmaster having observed at once that the lad was falling, and that he was liable to strike on his head in the net with the possible chance of breaking his neck.

Phil understood, then, exactly what his position was, and, with a slight upward tilt of his head, brought his body into position so that he would strike the net on his shoulders.

He hit the net with a smack, bounded high into the air, rounding off his accident by throwing a somersault on the net, bounding up and down a few times on his feet.

The audience, quick to appreciate what he had done, gave Phil a rousing cheer.

He shook his head and began clambering up the rope again.

"What happened to me?" he called across to the catcher.

"You turned too quickly."

"I'll do it right this time."

The band stopped playing, that its silence might emphasize the act. Then Phil, measuring his distance with keen eyes, launched into the air again. But instead of turning one somersault he turned two, landing fairly into the outstretched arms of Mr. Prentice, who gave him a mighty swing, whereat Phil hurled himself into a mad whirl, performing three more somersaults before he struck the net.

The audience howled with delight, and Mr. Sparling rushed forward fairly hugging the Circus Boy in his delight.

"Wonderful!" cried the showman. "You're a sure-enough star this time."

CHAPTER XXII. IN A LIVELY BLOW-DOWN

>From that moment on, until the close of the season, Phil Forrest retained his place on the aerial trapeze team, doubling up with his other work, and putting the finishing touches to what Mr. Sparling called "a great career on the bars."

But Phil, much as he loved the work, did not propose to spend all his life performing above the heads of the people. He felt that a greater future was before him on the ground at the front of the house.

Only a week remained now before the show would close for the season. Even in Texas, where they were showing, the nights had begun to grow chilly, stiffening the muscles of the performers and making them irritable. All were looking forward to the day when the tents should be struck for the last time that season.

"What's the next stand?" asked Phil in the dressing tent a few nights after his triumphal performance on the trapeze.

"Tucker, Texas," answered a voice.

"What's that?" shouted a clown.

"Tucker, I said."

"Any relation to Teddy Tucker?"

"I hope not," laughed the head clown.

"A place with that name spells trouble. Anything by the name of Tucker, whether it's Teddy or not, means that we are in for some kind of a mix-up. I wish I could go fishing tomorrow."

All in the dressing tent chuckled at the clown's sally.

"I know what you'd catch if you did," grumbled Teddy.

"Now, what would I catch, young man?" demanded the clown.

"You'd catch cold. That's all you can catch," retorted Teddy, whereat the laugh was turned on the clown, much to the latter's disgust.

Tucker proved to be a pretty little town on the open plain. There was nothing in the appearance of the place to indicate that they might look for trouble. However, as the clown had prophesied, trouble was awaiting them—trouble of a nature that the showman dreads from the beginning to the end of the circus season.

The afternoon performance passed off without a hitch, the tent being crowded almost to its capacity, Phil Forrest throwing himself into his work in the air with more spirit and enthusiasm than he had shown at any time since he took up his new work.

At Mr. Sparling's request, however, the lad had omitted his triple somersault from the trapeze bar. The showman considered the act too dangerous, assuring Phil that sooner or later he would be sure to break his neck.

Phil laughed at the owner's fears, but promised that he would try nothing beyond a double after that. He remembered how quickly he had lost himself when he attempted the feat before. Few men are able to do it without their brains becoming so confused that they lose all sense of direction and location.

The evening house was almost as large as that of the afternoon, as usual the audience being made up principally of town people, the country spectators having returned to their homes before night. The night set in dark and oppressive.

Soon after the gasoline lights were lighted the animals began growling, pacing their cages restlessly, while the lions roared intermittently, and the hyenas laughed almost hysterically.

It sent a shiver down the backs of nearly everyone who heard it—the shrill laugh of the hyenas reaching clear back to the dressing tent.

Teddy Tucker's eyes always grew large when he heard the laugh of the hyena.

"B-r-r-r!" exclaimed Teddy.

"You'll 'b-r-r-r' worse than that before you get through," growled a performer.

"Why?"

" 'Cause it means what somebody said the other night—trouble."

"What kind of trouble does it mean?" asked Phil.

"I don't know. Some kind of a storm, I guess. You can't always tell. Those animals know more than we human

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beings, when it comes to weather and that sort of thing," broke in Mr. Miaco the head clown.

"Well, you expected something would happen in a town called Tucker, didn't you?"

"Are you going to be with this show next season, Teddy?" questioned the clown who had taunted him before.

"I hope to."

"Then I sign out with some other outfit. I refuse to travel with a bunch that carries a hoodoo like you with it. I feel it in my bones that something is going to happen tonight, and just as soon as I can get through my act I'm going to run—run, mind you, not walk—back to the train as fast as my legs will carry me. That won't be any snail's pace, either."

The performers joked and passed the time away until the band started the overture, off under the big top. This means that it is about time for the show to begin, and that the music is started to hurry the people to their seats.

All hands fell silent as they got busy putting the finishing touches to their makeup.

"All acts cut short five minutes tonight," sang the voice of the ringmaster at the entrance to the dressing tent.

"You see," said the clown, nodding his head at Teddy.

"No, I hear," grumbled Teddy. "What's it all about?"

"Don't ask me. I don't know. I'm not running this show."

"Lucky for the show that you aren't," muttered the Circus Boy.

"What's that?"

"I was just thinking out loud, I guess."

"It's a bad habit. Don't do it when I'm around. All hoodoos talk to themselves and in their sleep."

The show was started off with a rush, the Grand Entry having been cut out again, as is frequently the case with a show where there is a long run ahead, or a storm is expected. That night those in the dressing tent could only surmise the reason. The hyena's warning was the only thing to guide the performers in their search for a reason for the haste. But they took the situation philosophically, as they always had, and prepared for the performance as usual.

The performance had gotten along well toward the end, and without the slightest interruption. All hands were beginning to feel a certain sense of relief, when the shrill blasts of the boss canvasman's emergency whistle were heard outside the big top.

Phil had just completed his trapeze act and was dropping into the net when the whistle sounded.

He glanced up and made a signal to the others in the air. They dropped, one by one, to the net and swung themselves to the ground, where they stood awaiting the completion of the piece that the band was playing.

"Wind, isn't it?" questioned Mr. Prentice.

Phil nodded.

He was listening intently. His keen ears caught a distant roar that caused him to gaze apprehensively aloft.

"I am afraid we are going to have trouble," he said.

"It has been in the air all the evening," was the low answer. "Wonder if they have the menagerie tent out of the way?"

It was being taken down at that moment, the elephants having been removed to the train, as had part of the cages.

All at once there was a roar that sent the blood from the faces of the spectators. The boss canvasman's whistle trilled excitedly.

"There go the dressing tents," said Phil calmly as a ripping and rending was heard off by the paddock. "I hope it hasn't taken my trunk with it. Glad I locked the trunk before coming into the ring."

The band stopped playing suddenly. The tent was in absolute silence.

"It's a cyclone!" shouted a voice among the spectators.

A murmur ran over the assemblage. In a moment they would be in a mad rush, trampling each other under foot in their efforts to escape.

Phil bounded toward the band.

"Play! Play!" he shouted. "They'll stampede if you don't. Play, I tell you!"

The bandmaster waved his baton and the music of the band drowned out the mutterings of the storm for the moment.

Suddenly the roaring without grew louder. Ropes were creaking, center and quarter poles lifting themselves a

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few inches from the ground, dangerously.

"It's blowing end on," muttered Phil, running full speed down the concourse in his ring costume.

"Keep your seats!" he shouted. "There may be no danger. If the tent should go down you will be safer where you are. Keep your seats, everybody."

Phil dashed on, shouting his warning until he had gotten halfway around the tent. Mr. Prentice had taken up the lad's cry on the other side.

Then the blow fell.

The big top bent under the sweep of the gale until the center poles were leaning far over to the north. Had the wind not struck the tent on the end it must have gone down under the first blast. As it was, canvas, rope and pole were holding, but every stitch of canvas and every pole was trembling under its burden.

"Sit steady, everybody! We may be able to weather it."

Phil saw that, if the people were to run into the arena and the tent should fall, many must be crushed under the center and quarter poles.

Up and down he ran shouting words of encouragement, and he was thus engaged when Mr. Sparling worked his way in from the pad room, as the open enclosure between the two dressing tents is called. Phil had picked up the ringmaster's whip and was cracking it to attract the attention of the people to what he was trying to tell them.

Somehow, many seemed to gain confidence from this plucky, slender lad clad in silk tights, who was rushing up and down as cool and collected as if three thousand persons were not in deadly peril.

Nothing but Phil Forrest's coolness saved many from death that night.

A mighty roar suddenly drew every eye in the tent to the south end where the wind was pressing against the canvas with increasing force.

Phil stood near the entrance, the flap of which had been quickly laced and staked down when the canvasmen saw the gale coming upon them.

He turned quickly, for the roar had seemed to be almost at his side. What he saw drew an exclamation from Phil that, at other times, might have been humorous. There was no humor in it now.

"Gracious!" exclaimed the lad.

There, within twenty feet of him stood a lion, a huge, powerful beast, with head up, the hair standing straight along its back, the mane rippling in the breeze.

"It's Wallace," breathed the lad, almost unable to believe his eyes. The biggest lion in captivity, somehow in the excitement had managed to escape from his cage.

"Now there'll be a panic for sure! They've seen him!"

"Sit still and keep still! He won't hurt you!" shouted Phil. "Now, you get out of here!" commanded Phil, starting toward Wallace and cracking the ringmaster's whip in the animal's face.

Just for the briefest part of a second did Wallace give way, then with a terrific roar, he bounded clear over the Circus Boy's head, bowling Phil over as he leaped, and on down to the center of the arena.

Phil had not been hurt. He was up and after the dangerous beast in a twinkling. The audience saw what he was trying to do.

"Keep away from him!" bellowed Mr. Sparling.

"Throw a net over him!" shouted Phil.

However, between the storm and the escaped lion, none seemed to have his wits about him sufficiently to know what was best to do. Had the showmen acted promptly when Phil called, they might have been able to capture the beast then and there.

Seeing that they were not going to do so, and that the lion was walking slowly toward the reserved seats, Phil sprang in front of the dangerous brute to head him off.

The occupants of the reserved seats were standing up. The panic might break at any minute.

"Sit down!" came the command, in a stern, boyish voice.

Phil faced the escaped lion, starting toward it with a threatening motion of the whip.

"Are you ever going to get a net?"

"Get a net!" thundered Mr. Sparling. "Get away from him, Phil!"

Instead of doing so, the Circus Boy stepped closer to the beast. No one made the slightest move to capture the beast, as Phil realized might easily be done now, if only a few had the presence of mind to attempt it.

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Crack!

The ringmaster's whip in Phil's hands snapped and the leather lash bit deep into the nose of Wallace.

With a roar that sounded louder than that of the storm outside the lion took a quick step forward, only to get the lash on his nose again.

Suddenly he turned about and in long, curving bounds headed for the lower end of the tent. Mr. Sparling sprang to one side, knowing full well that it would be better to lose the lion than to stir up the audience more than they already were stirred.

Phil was in full pursuit, cracking his whip at every jump.

Wallace leaped through the open flap at the lower end of the tent and disappeared in the night.

Just as he did so there came a sound different from anything that had preceded it. A series of reports followed one another until it sounded as if a battery of small cannon were being fired, together with a ripping and tearing and rending that sent every spectator in the big tent, to his feet yelling and shouting.

"The tent is coming down! The tent is coming down!"

Women fainted and men began fighting to get down into the arena.

"Stay where you are!" shouted Phil. Then the Circus Boy did a bold act. Running along in front of the seats he let drive the lash of his long whip full into the faces of the struggling people. The sting of the lash brought many of them to their senses. Then they too turned to help hold the others back.

With a wrench, the center poles were lifted several feet up into the air.

"Look out for the quarter poles! Keep back or you'll be killed!" shouted Phil.

"Keep back! Keep back!" bellowed Mr. Sparling.

And now the quarter poles—the poles that stand leaning toward the center of the arena, just in front of the lower row of seats—began to fall, crashing inward, forced to the north.

The center poles snapped like pipe stems, pieces of them being hurled half the length of the tent.

Down came the canvas, extinguishing the lights and leaving the place in deep darkness. The people were fairly beside themselves with fright. But still that boyish voice was heard above the uproar:

"Sit still! Sit still!"

The whole mass of canvas collapsed and went rolling northward like a sail suddenly ripped from the yards of a ship.

The last mighty blow of the storm had been more than canvas and painted poles could stand.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE LION HUNT

For a moment there was silence. Then the people began shouting.

"Bring lights, men!" thundered the owner of the show.

Being so near the outer edges of the tent, the people had escaped almost without injury. Many had been bruised as the canvas swept over them, knocking them flat and some falling all the way through between the seats to the ground, where they were in little danger.

"Wait till the lights come! Phil! Phil!"

Phil Forrest did not answer. He had been knocked clear into the center of the arena by a falling quarter pole, and stunned. The Circus Boy's head was pretty hard, however, and no more than a minute had passed before he was at work digging his way out of the wreck.

"Phillip!"

"Here!"

"Thank heaven," muttered the showman. "I was afraid he had been killed. Are you all right?" Mr. Sparling made his way in Phil's direction.

"Yes. How—how many were killed?"

"I hope none," replied Mr. Sparling. "As soon as the lights are on and all this stuff hauled out of the way we shall know."

Most of the canvas had been blown from the circus arena proper so that little was left there save the seats, a portion of the bandstand, the wrecks of the ruined poles and circus properties, together with some of the side walls, which still were standing.

By this time the tornado, for such it had developed into, had passed entirely and the moon came out, shining down into the darkened circus arena, lighting it up brightly.

About that time torches were brought. The people had rushed down from the seats as soon as the big top had blown away.

"I want all who have been injured to wait until I can see them," shouted Mr. Sparling. "Many of you owe your lives to this young man. Had you started when the blow came many of you would have been killed. Has anyone been seriously hurt?"

A chorus of "no's" echoed from all sides.

The showman breathed a sigh of relief. A bare half dozen had to be helped down from the seats, where they had been struck by flying debris, but beyond that no one obeyed Mr. Sparling's request to remain.

The men had run quickly along under the seats to see if by any chance injured persons had fallen through. They helped a few out and these walked hurriedly away, bent on getting off the circus lot as quickly as possible after their exciting experiences.

"No one killed, Phil."

"I'm glad of that. I'm going to look for Wallace. Better get your men out right away, or he'll be too far away for us ever to catch him again. Have the menagerie men gone to look for him?"

"I don't know, Phil. You will remember that I have been rather busily engaged for the past ten or fifteen minutes."

"We all have. Well, I'm going to take a run and see if I can get track of the lion."

"Be careful. Better get your clothes on the first thing you do."

"Guess he hasn't any. His trunk and mine have gone away somewhere," nodded Teddy.

"Never mind the clothes. I'm on a lion hunt now," laughed Phil, starting from the enclosure on a run.

"Nothing can stop that boy," muttered Mr. Sparling. The owner was all activity now, giving his orders at rapid-fire rate. First, the men were ordered to gather the canvas and stretch it out on the lot so an inventory might be taken to determine in what shape the show had been left. Others were assigned to search the lot for show properties, costumes and the like, and in a very short time the big, machine-like organization was working methodically and without excitement.

It must not be thought that nothing was being done toward catching the escaped lion. Fully fifty men had

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started in pursuit immediately after the escape. They had been detained for a few minutes by the blow down, after which every man belonging to the menagerie tent, who could be spared, joined in the chase.

The lion cage, one of the few left remaining on the lot, had been blown over as it was being taken away. The shock had burst open the rear door and Wallace was quick to take advantage of the opportunity to regain his freedom. An iron-barred partition separated him from his mate. Fortunately this partition had held, leaving the lioness still confined in the cage.

The attendants quickly righted the cage, making fast the door so that there might be no repetition of the disaster.

Seeing Phil hurrying away Teddy took to his heels also, and within a short distance caught up with his companion.

"You going to look for that lion, Phil?"

"Yes."

"So am I."

"You had better stay here, Teddy. You might get hurt."

"What about yourself?"

"Oh, I'm not afraid," laughed Phil.

"Don't you call me a coward, Phil Forrest. I've got as much sand as you have any time."

"Why, I didn't call you a coward. I—"

"Yes, you did; yes, you did!"

"Don't let's quarrel. Remember we are on a lion hunt just now. Hey, Bob." hailed Phil, discovering one of the menagerie attendants.

"Hello."

"Which way did he go?"

"We don't know. When the blow down came we lost all track of Wallace. He's probably headed for the open country."

"Where are the searchers?"

"All over. A party went west, another north and the third to the east."

"What about the village—did no one go that way to hunt for him?"

"No; he wouldn't go to town."

"Think not?"

"Sure of it."

"Why not?"

"He'd want to get away from the people as quick as he could. You don't catch Wallace going into any town or any other place where there's people."

"I noticed that he came in under the big top where there were about three thousand of them," replied Phil dryly.

"He was scared; that's what made him do that."

"And that very emotion may have sent him into the town. I'm going over there to start something on my own hook. Are you going along Teddy?"

"You bet I am. I always did like to hunt lions."

"When you are sure you are going away from the lion, instead of in his direction," suggested Phil, laughingly. "What's that you have in your hand?"

"It's an iron tent stake I picked up on the lot. I'll fetch him a wallop that'll make him see stars if I catch close enough sight of him."

"I don't think you will get quite that close to Wallace."

"I'll show you."

By this time the word had spread all over town that the whole menagerie of the Sparling Combined Shows had escaped. The streets were cleared in short order. Here and there, from an upper window, might be seen the whites of the frightened eyes of a Negro peering down, hoping to catch sight of the wild beasts, and fearful lest he should. "If it was an elephant we might trail him," suggested Teddy.

"That's not a half bad idea. The dust is quite thick. I wish we had thought to bring a torch with us."

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"I'll tell you where we can get one."

"Where?"

"One of the markers set up to guide the wagon drivers to the railroad yards. There's a couple on the next street above here. I saw them just a minute ago."

"Teddy you are a genius. And to think I have known you all this time and never found it out before. Come on, we'll get the torches."

They started on a run across an open lot, then turning into the street above, saw the torches flaring by the roadside half a block away. Jerking the lights up the lads ran back to the street they had previously left.

"Where shall we look?"

"We might as well begin right here, Teddy. I can't help believing that Wallace is somewhere in the town. I don't believe, for a minute, that he would run off into the country. If he has he'll be back in a very short time. You remember what I tell you. If we can get track of him we'll follow and send word back to the lot so they can come and get him."

"Why not catch him ourselves?"

"I don't think we two boys had better try that. I am afraid it would prove too much for us."

"I've got a tent stake. I'm not afraid. Why didn't you bring a club?"

"I have the ringmaster's whip. I prefer that to a club when it comes to meeting a wild lion. Hello, up there!" called Phil, discovering two men looking out of a window above him.

"Hello yourself. You fellows belong to the circus?"

"Yes. Have you seen anything of a lion around this part of the town?"

"A tall fellow about my size, with blue eyes and blonde hair," added Teddy.

"Stop your fooling, Teddy."

"A lion?"

"Yes."

"Only one?"

"That's all," replied Phil a bit impatiently. "Have you seen him?"

"Why, we heard the whole menagerie had escaped."

"That is a mistake. Only one animal got away—the lion."

"No; we haven't seen him, but we heard him a little while ago."

"Where, where?" questioned the boy eagerly.

"Heard him roar, and it sounded as if he was off in that direction."

"O, thank you, thank you," answered Phil.

"Say, are you in the show did you say?" now catching sight of Phil's tights under the bright moonlight.

"Yes."

"What do you do?"

"I am in the big trapeze act, the flying rings and a few other little things."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. Well, you'll have to excuse us. We must be going."

"You boys are not going out after that lion alone, are you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Great Caesar! What do you think of that? Wait a minute; we'll get our guns and join you."

"Please, I would rather you would not. We don't want to kill the lion, you see."

"Don't want to kill him?" questioned the man in amazement.

"Certainly not. We want to capture him. If the town's people will simply stay in their homes, and not bother us, we shall get him before morning and no one will be the worse for his escape. Wallace is worth a few thousand dollars, I suppose you are aware. Come along, Teddy."

Leaving the two men to utter exclamations of amazement, the lads started off in the direction indicated by the others.

"What did I tell you, Teddy? That lion is in the town at this very minute. He's probably eating up someone's fresh meat by this time. Hold your torch down and keep watch of the street. You keep that side and I'll watch this. We will each take half of the road."

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The Circus Boys had been around the animals of the menagerie for nearly three years now, it will be remembered, and they had wholly lost that fear that most people outside the circus feel for the savage beasts of the jungle. They thought little more of this lion hunt, so far as the danger was concerned, than if they had been chasing a runaway circus horse or tame elephant.

All at once Teddy Tucker uttered an exclamation.

"What is it?"

"I've landed the gentleman."

"You sure?"

"Yes; here are his tracks."

"That's so; you have. Don't lose them now. We'll run him down yet. Won't Mr. Sparling be pleased?"

"I reckon he will. But we have got to catch the cat first before we can please anybody. I wonder how we're going to do it?"

"We shall see about that later."

The boys started on a trot, holding their torches close to the ground. Their course took them about on another street leading at right angles to the one they had been following.

All at once they seemed to have lost the trail. Before them stood a handsome house, set well back in a green lawn. The house was lighted up, and evidently some kind of an entertainment was going on within.

"He's gone over in some of these yards," breathed Phil. "Let's take the place that's lighted up, first. He'd be more likely to go where there is life. He—"

Phil's words were cut short by a shriek of terror from the lighted house followed by another and another.

"He's there! Come on!"

Both boys vaulted the fence and ran to the front door. By this time shriek upon shriek rent the air. The lads burst into the house without an instant's hesitation.

"Upstairs!" cried Phil, bounding up three steps at a time.

A woman, pale and wide-eyed, had pointed that way when she saw the two boys in their circus tights and realized what they had come there for.

In a large room a dozen people, pale and frightened were standing, one man with hand on the door ready to slam it shut at first sign of the intruder.

"Where—where is he?" demanded Phil breathlessly.

"We were playing cards, and when somebody looked up he saw that beast standing in the door here looking in. He—he went down in the back yard. Maybe you will be able to see him if you go in the room across the hall there. There's a yard fenced off there for the dogs to run in."

Phil bounded across the hall followed by two of the men.

"Does that stairway lead down into the back yard?" questioned Phil.

"Yes, yes."

"Was the door open?"

"Yes, yes."

"Is it open now?"

"Yes. We can feel the draft."

"Show me into the room and I'll take a look."

One of the men, who evidently lived in the house, stepped gingerly across the hall, turned the knob and pushed the door in ever so little. Phil and Teddy, with torches still in hand, crowded in.

As they did so their guide uttering a frightened yell, slammed the door shut, and Phil heard a bolt shoot in place.

The boys found themselves in a large room running the full depth of the house. It had been rigged up, as a gymnasium, with the familiar flying rings, parallel bars and other useful equipment.

All this they saw instinctively. But what they saw beyond all this caused the Circus Boys to pause almost spellbound.

"He's in there! He's in there!" shouted half a dozen voices at the same moment. Then the lads heard the people rush down the stairs and out into the street shouting and screaming for help.

Crouching in the far corner of the room, lashing its tail, its evil eyes fixed upon them, was the lion Wallace.

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"Wow!" breathed Teddy.

Phil with eyes fixed upon the lion reached back one hand and tried the door behind him. It was locked.

"Teddy, don't make any sudden moves," cautioned Phil in a low voice. "We're locked in. Give me your torch. Now edge over to that open window and drop out. We can't both try it, or Wallace will be upon us in a flash. When you get out, run for the lot. Run as you never ran before. Get the men here. Have them rush Wallace's cage here. Be careful until you get out. Those people have locked us in. I shouldn't dare open the door anyway, now, for he'd catch us before we could get out. I know the ways of these tricky cats."

"Phil, he'll kill you!"

"He won't. I've got the torches. They're the best weapons a man could have—they and the whip."

Teddy edged toward the window while Phil with a stern command to the lion to "charge!" at the same time cracking the whip and thrusting the torches toward the beast, checked the rush that Wallace seemed about to make.

Teddy dropped from the window a moment later. Then began an experience for Phil Forrest that few boys would have had the courage to face.

Not for an instant did the Circus Boy lose his presence of mind. He took good care not to crowd Wallace, giving him plenty of room, constantly talking to him as he had frequently heard the animal's keeper do, and keeping the beast's mind occupied as much as he could.

Now and then Wallace would attempt to creep up on Phil, whereupon the lad would start forward thrusting the torches before him and crack the whip again. Wallace was afraid of fire, and under the menacing thrusts of the torches would back cowering into his corner.

For a full half hour did Phil Forrest face this deadly peril, cool, collected, his mind ever on the alert, standing there in his pink tights, almost a heroic figure as he poised in the light of the flaring torches, the smoke of which got into his lungs and made him cough. He did all he could to suppress this, for it disturbed and irritated Wallace, who showed his disapproval by swishing his tail and uttering low, deep growls of resentment.

Phil backed away a little so as to get nearer the window that he might find more fresh air. Wallace followed. Phil sprang at him.

"Charge!" he commanded making several violent thrusts with the torches, at which Wallace backed away again and crouched lower. Phil saw that the lion was preparing to jump over his head; and, discovering this, the lad held one torch high above his head and kept it swaying there from side to side.

Suddenly he made another discovery.

The light seemed to be growing dim. A quick glance at the flames of the torches told him what the trouble was.

He dared not let his eyes dwell on the flame for more than a brief instant for the glare would so blind him that he would not be able to clearly make out the lion. To lose sight of Wallace for a few seconds might mean a sudden and quick end to Phil Forrest, and he knew it full well.

The lad backed a bit closer to the window, keeping his torches moving rapidly to hide his movements.

Wallace, watching the torches did not observe the action.

"The torches are going out," breathed Phil. "If the folks don't come soon I've got to jump through window glass and all or Wallace will spring."

Phil was in a desperate situation.

CHAPTER XXIV. CONCLUSION

"Down, Wallace! Charge!"

The Circus Boy's whip cracked viciously, while the dying torches formed thin circles of fire as they were swung above the lad's head.

"I shan't be able to hold him off much longer. Wallace knows, as well as I do, that his turn is coming in a short time. If I happen to be within reach then, something surely is going to happen. Hark! What's that?"

Distant shouts were borne faintly to Phil's ears. He listened intently, catching another and welcome sound. The latter was the rumble of a heavy wagon, being driven rapidly along the paved street of the town.

"It's a circus wagon," breathed the lad, recognizing the sound instantly. "I hope it is the wagon."

He listened intently, keeping the torches moving, now and then cracking his whip and uttering sharp commands to Wallace.

The animal was growing more and more restless. His wild instincts were returning to him.

The torches were so low, now, that Phil could scarcely see the beast. Then, all at once, he realized that Wallace was creeping toward him unmindful of the lash or of the fading torches.

Phil waited, peering into the shadows. He was not afraid, as he recalled his sensations afterwards; but a strange little thrill seemed to be racing up and down his spinal column.

Then the lad did a daring thing. He sprang forward to meet Wallace. The astonished lion halted for a brief instant, and in that instant the Circus Boy thrust one of the torches full in his face. The flame burned the nose of the king of beasts and singed his brow as well.

Uttering a mighty roar Wallace cleared the floor, springing backwards and landing against the wall with such force as to jar several panes of glass from the window nearby.

"Phil! Phil! Are you there?" came a hesitating voice from behind the lad. It was the voice of Teddy Tucker on a ladder at one side of the window from which he had jumped earlier in the evening.

"Yes, yes. Be careful. Did you bring them?"

"We've got the cage. Mr. Sparling is here, too. He's half worried to death. What shall we do?"

"Have them draw the cage up in the back yard and back it against the open door. When that's done some of you come upstairs and throw the door open. Be sure to leave a light in the hall, but jump into the room across the hall as soon as you open the door. Wallace will scent his mate and I'll wager he'll trot right downstairs and jump into his cage. Have someone standing by to close the doors on him. Hurry now. Tell them my torches won't last five minutes longer."

Teddy slid down the ladder without waiting to place feet or hand on the rungs, and Phil's anxious ears told him the men were drawing the cage around to the rear yard.

Soon he heard footsteps on the back stairs. Wallace was showing new signs of agitation.

"All ready, in there?"

"All ready," answered Phil.

Teddy jerked the door open and leaping across the hall, shut himself in the room opposite. Wallace paused, his tail beating the wall behind him; then uttering a roar that shook the building, the shaggy beast leaped into the hall. There he paused for an instant. One bound took him to the foot of the stairs. The next landed him in the cage next to his mate. The cage doors closed behind him with a metallic snap.

Wallace was safe.

"Got him!" shouted a voice from below.

Phil drew a long sigh of relief. Someone dashed up the stairs on a run. It was Mr. Sparling. He grabbed Phil Forrest in his arms, hugging him until the dead torches fell to the floor with a clatter and the lad begged to be released.

"My brave Phil, my brave boy!" breathed the showman. "No one but you could have done a thing like that. You have saved the lives of many people this night, and what is more you have captured the most valuable lion in the world—you and Teddy. I don't know what to say nor how to say it. I—"

"I wouldn't try were I in your place," grinned Phil. "I presume you will have to settle with these people for the

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slight damage that has been done to their house."

"I'll settle the bills; don't you worry about that."

"Any more lions lying around loose in here?" questioned Teddy, poking his head in through the open door. "I and my little club are ready for them if there are."

"Shall we be going, Mr. Sparling?"

"Yes."

Together the three made their way down the stairs just as the cage was being driven from the yard. As soon as he could find the owner of the house the showman paid him for the damages.

"What shape is the big top in?" asked Phil as they walked slowly back toward the lot.

"Bad, very bad. I might say that it comes pretty near being a hopeless wreck. Still it may be patched up."

"I am sure of it. I know a blown-down tent is not half as hopeless as it looks. I saw the Robinson shows with a blown-down tent once."

"I have been thinking the matter over, Phil."

"Yes."

"We have only a few days more to go before the close of the season, and it seems to me that the best plan would be to close right here and go in. What do you think?"

"I think," answered Phil Forrest slowly, "that I should turn all hands loose and fix that tent up so the show will be able to make the next stand and give a performance by tomorrow night at latest. It can be done. If the tent is too badly torn to set up a six pole show, make it a four pole show, or use the menagerie tent for the circus performance. I should never have it said that the Sparling Combined Shows were put out of business by a gale of wind."

Mr. Sparling halted.

"Phil, there is an old saying to the effect that you can't 'teach an old dog new tricks.' It's not true. You have taught me a new trick. The Sparling shows shall go on to the close of the season. We'll make the next town, somehow, and we'll give them a show the like of which they never before have seen."

"If they had been here tonight they would have seen one such as they never saw before," grinned Teddy.

"Yes."

"A sort of Wild South instead of Wild West show," added the irrepressible Teddy.

All that night the showmen worked, Phil not even taking the time to discard his gaudy ring clothes. The next morning both he and Teddy were sights to behold, but the show had been loaded, and the big top straightened out and put in shape so that it could be pitched when the next town was reached. At last the boys decided to hunt up their trunks. They found them, after a long search. Getting behind a pole wagon they put on their clothes. An hour later they were on their way to the next stand, tired but proud of their achievements and happy.

The news of the accident to the show, as well as the capture of the big lion, Wallace, by the Circus Boys, had preceded them to the next town. Once more Phil Forrest and Teddy Tucker were hailed as heroes, which they really had proved themselves to be.

A very fair performance, considering their crippled condition, was given that afternoon. By the next day the show was on its feet again, and from then on to the close of the season, no other exciting incidents occurred.

Two weeks later the big top came down for the last time that year. On the afternoon of that happy day, the associates of the Circus Boys gave a banquet for the two lads under the cook tent, at which Teddy Tucker distinguished himself by making a speech that set the whole tent in an uproar of merriment.

Good-byes were said, and the circus folks departed that night bag and baggage to scatter to the four quarters of the globe, some never to return to the Sparling shows. Phil and Teddy returned to Edmeston to finish their course at the high school, from which they were to graduate in the following spring.

How the lads joined out with the circus the next season will be told in a succeeding volume entitled, "THE CIRCUS BOYS ON THE MISSISSIPPI; Or, Afloat with the Big Show on the Big River." This was destined to be one of the most interesting journeys of their circus careers—one filled with new and exciting experiences and thrilling adventures.

Until then we will leave them to continue their studies in the little village of Edmeston.