

THE CIRCUS BOYS ON THE FLYING RINGS

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CHAPTER I

THE LURE OF THE CIRCUS

"I say, Phil, I can do that."

"Do what, Teddy?"

"A cartwheel in the air like that fellow is doing in the picture on the billboard there."

"Oh, pshaw! You only think you can. Besides, that's not a cartwheel; that's a double somersault. It's a real stunt, let me tell you. Why, I can do a cartwheel myself. But up in the air like that—well, I don't know. I guess not. I'd be willing to try it, though, if I had something below to catch me," added the lad, critically surveying the figures on the poster before them.

"How'd you like to be a circus man, Phil?"

Phil's dark eyes glowed with a new light, his slender figure straightening until the lad appeared fully half a head taller.

"More than anything else in the world," he breathed. "Would you?"

"Going to be," nodded Teddy decisively, as if the matter were already settled.

"Oh, you are, eh?"

"Uh-huh!"

"When?"

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"I don't know. Someday-someday when I get old enough, maybe."

Phil Forrest surveyed his companion with a half critical smile on his face.

"What are you going to do-be a trapeze performer or what?"

"Well," reflected the lad wisely, "maybe I shall be an 'Or What.' I'm not sure. Sometimes I think I should like to be the fellow who cracks the whip with the long lash and makes the clowns hop around on one foot--"

"You mean the ringmaster?"

"I guess that's the fellow. He makes 'em all get around lively. Then, sometimes, I think I would rather be a clown. I can skin a cat on the flying rings to beat the band, now. What would you rather be, Phil?"

"Me? Oh, something up in the air-high up near the peak of the tent-something thrilling that would make the people sit up on the board seats and gasp, when, all dressed in pink and spangles, I'd go flying through the air--"

"Just like a bird?" questioned Teddy, with a rising inflection in his voice.

"Yes. That's what I'd like most to do, Teddy," concluded the lad, his face flushed with the thought of the triumphs that might be his.

Teddy Tucker uttered a soft, long-drawn whistle.

"My, you've got it bad, haven't you? Never thought you were that set on the circus. Wouldn't it be fine, now, if we both could get with a show?"

"Great!" agreed Phil, with an emphatic nod. "Sometimes I think my uncle would be glad to have me go away-that he wouldn't care whether I joined a circus, or what became of me."

"Ain't had much fun since your ma died, have you, Phil?" questioned Teddy sympathetically.

"Not much," answered the lad, a thin, gray mist clouding his eyes. "No, not much. But, then, I'm not complaining."

"Your uncle's a mean old--"

"There, there, Teddy, please don't say it. He may be all you think he is, but for all the mean things he's said and done to me, I've never given him an impudent word, Teddy. Can you guess why?"

"Cause he's your uncle, maybe," grumbled Teddy.

"No, 'cause he's my mother's brother—that's why."

"I don't know. Maybe I'd feel that way if I'd had a mother."

"But you did."

"Nobody ever introduced us, if I did. Guess she didn't know me. But if your uncle was my uncle do you know what I'd do with him, Phil Forrest?"

"Don't let's talk about him. Let's talk about the circus. It's more fun," interrupted Phil, turning to the billboard again and gazing at it with great interest.

They were standing before the glowing posters of the Great Sparling Combined Shows, that was to visit Edmeston on the following Thursday.

Phillip Forrest and Teddy Tucker were fast friends, though they were as different in appearance and temperament as two boys well could be. Phil was just past sixteen, while Teddy was a little less than a year younger. Phil's figure was slight and graceful, while that of his companion was short and chubby.

Both lads were orphans. Phil's parents had been dead for something more than five years. Since their death he had been living with a penurious old uncle who led a hermit-like existence in a shack on the outskirts of Edmeston.

But the lad could remember when it had been otherwise—when he had lived in his own home, surrounded by luxury and refinement, until evil days came upon them without warning. His father's property had been swept away, almost in a night. A year later both of his parents had died, leaving him to face the world alone.

The boy's uncle had taken him in begrudgingly, and Phil's life from that moment on had been one of self-denial and hard work. Yet he was thankful for one thing—thankful that his miserly old uncle had permitted him to continue at school.

Standing high in his class meant something in Phil's case, for the boy was obliged to work at whatever he could find to do after

school hours, his uncle compelling him to contribute something to the household expenses every week. His duties done, Phil was obliged to study far into the night, under the flickering light of a tallow candle, because oil cost too much. Sometimes his candle burned far past the midnight hour, while he applied himself to his books that he might be prepared for the next day's classes.

Hard lines for a boy?

Yes. But Phil Forrest was not the lad to complain. He went about his studies the same as he approached any other task that was set for him to do—went about it with a grim, silent determination to conquer it. And he always did.

As for Teddy—christened Theodore, but so long ago that he had forgotten that that was his name—he studied, not because he possessed a burning desire for knowledge, but as a matter of course, and much in the same spirit he did the chores for the people with whom he lived.

Teddy was quite young when his parents died leaving him without a relative in the world. A poor, but kind-hearted family in Edmeston had taken the lad in rather than see him become a public charge. With them he had lived and been cared for ever since. Of late years, however, he had been able to do considerable toward lightening the burden for them by the money he managed to earn here and there.

The two boys were on their way home from school. There remained but one more day before the close of the term, which was a matter of sincere regret to Phil and of keen satisfaction to his companion. Just now both were too full of the subject of the coming show to think of much else.

"Going to the show, Phil?"

"I am afraid not."

"Why not?"

"I haven't any money; that's the principal reason," smiled the boy. "Are you?"

"Sure. Don't need any money to go to a circus."

"You don't?"

"No."

"How do you manage it?"

"Crawl in under the tent when the man ain't looking," answered Teddy promptly.

"I wouldn't want to do that," decided the older lad, with a shake of the head. "It wouldn't be quite honest. Do you think so?"

Teddy Tucker shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Never thought about it. Don't let myself think about it. Isn't safe, for I might not go to the show if I did. What's your other reason?"

"For not going to the circus?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't think Uncle would let me; that's a fact."

"Why not?"

"Says circuses and all that sort of thing are evil influences."

"Oh, pshaw! Wish he was my uncle," decided Teddy belligerently. "How long are you going to stand for being mauled around like a little yellow dog?"

"I'll stand most anything for the sake of getting an education. When I get that then I'm going to strike out for myself, and do something in the world. You'll hear from me yet, Teddy Tucker, and maybe I'll hear from you, too."

"See me, you mean—see me doing stunts on a high something-or-other in a circus. Watch me turn a somersault."

The lad stood poised on the edge of the ditch, on the other side of which the billboard stood. This gave him the advantage of an elevated position from which to attempt his feat.

"Look out that you don't break your neck," warned Phil. "I'd try it on a haymow, or something like that, first."

"Don't you worry about me. See how easy that fellow in the picture is doing it. Here goes!"

Teddy launched himself into the air, with a very good imitation of a diver making a plunge into the water, hands stretched out before him, legs straight behind him.

He was headed straight for the ditch.

"Turn, Teddy! Turn! You'll strike on your head."

Teddy was as powerless to turn as if he had been paralyzed from head to foot. Down he went, straight as an arrow. There followed a splash as his head struck the water of the ditch, the lad's feet beating a tattoo in the air while his head was stuck fast in the mud at the bottom of the ditch.

"He'll drown," gasped Phil, springing down into the little stream, regardless of the damage liable to be done to his own clothes.

Throwing both arms about the body of his companion he gave a mighty tug. Teddy stuck obstinately, and Phil was obliged to take a fresh hold before he succeeded in hauling the lad from his perilous position. Teddy was gasping for breath. His face, plastered with mud, was unrecognizable, while his clothes were covered from head to foot.

Phil dumped him on the grass beneath the circus billboard and began wiping the mud from his companion's face, while Teddy quickly sat up, blinking the mud out of his eyes and grumbling unintelligibly.

"You're a fine circus performer, you are," laughed Phil. "Suppose you had been performing on a flying trapeze in a circus, what do you suppose would have happened to you?"

"I'd have had a net under me then, and I wouldn't have fallen in the ditch," grunted Teddy sullenly.

"What do you suppose the folks will say when you go home in that condition?"

"Don't care what they say. Fellow has got to learn sometime, and if I don't have any worse thing happen to me than falling in a ditch I ought to be pretty well satisfied. Guess I'll go back now. Come on, go 'long with me."

Phil turned and strode along by the side of his companion until they reached the house where Teddy lived.

"Come on in."

"I'm sorry, Teddy, but I can't. My uncle will be expecting me, and he won't like it if I am late."

"All right; see you tomorrow if you don't come out again tonight. We'll try some more stunts then."

"I wouldn't till after the circus, were I in your place," laughed Phil.

"Why not!"

"Cause, if you break your neck, you won't be able to go to the show."

"Huh!" grunted Teddy, hastily turning his back on his companion and starting for the house.

Phil took his way home silently and thoughtfully, carrying his precious bundle of books under an arm, his active mind planning as to how he might employ his time to the best advantage during the summer vacation that was now so close at hand.

A rheumatic, bent figure was standing in front of the shack where the lad lived, glaring up the street from beneath bushy eyebrows, noting Phil Forrest's leisurely gait disapprovingly.

Phil saw him a moment later.

"I'm in for a scolding," he muttered. "Wonder what it is all about this time. I don't seem able to do a thing to please Uncle Abner."

CHAPTER II

PHIL HEARS HIS DISMISSAL

"Where you been, young man?" The question was a snarl rather than a sentence.

"To school, Uncle, of course."

"School's been out more than an hour. I say, where have you been?"

"I stopped on the way for a few minutes."

"You did?" exploded Abner Adams. "Where?"

"Teddy Tucker and I stopped to read a circus bill over there on Clover Street. We did not stop but a few minutes. Was there any harm in that?"

"Harm? Circus bill--"

"And I want to go to the circus, too, Uncle, when it comes here. You know? I have not been to anything of that sort since mother died--not once. I'll work and earn the money. I can go in the evening after my work is finished. Please let me go, Uncle."

For a full minute Abner Adams was too overcome with his emotions to speak. He hobbled about in a circle, smiting the ground with his cane, alternately brandishing it threateningly in the air over the head of the unflinching Phil.

"Circus!" he shouted. "I might have known it! I might have known it! You and that Tucker boy are two of a kind. You'll both come to some bad ending. Only fools and questionable characters go to such places--"

"My mother and father went, and they always took me," replied the boy, drawing himself up with dignity. "You certainly do not include them in either of the two classes you have named?"

"So much the worse for them! So much the worse for them. They were a pair of--"

"Uncle, Uncle!" warned Phil. "Please don't say anything against my parents. I won't stand it. Don't forget that my mother was your own sister, too."

"I'm not likely to forget it, after she's bundled such a baggage as you into my care. You're turning out a worthless, good-for-nothing loaf--"

"You haven't said whether or not I might go to the circus, Uncle," reminded Phil.

"Circus? No! I'll have none of my money spent on any such worthless--"

"But I didn't ask you to spend your money, even though you have plenty of it. I said I would earn the money--"

"You'll have a chance to earn it, and right quick at that. No, you won't go to any circus so long as you're living under my roof."

"Very well, Uncle, I shall do as you wish, of course," answered Phil, hiding his disappointment as well as he could. The lad shifted his bundle of books to the other hand and started slowly for the house.

Abner Adams hobbled about until he faced the lad again, an angry gleam lighting up his squinting eyes.

"Come back here!"

Phil halted, turning.

"I said come back here."

The lad did so, his self-possession and quiet dignity never deserting him for an instant. This angered the crabbed old uncle more than ever.

"When will you get through school?"

"Tomorrow, I believe."

"Huh! Then, I suppose you intend to loaf for the rest of the summer and live on my hard earned savings. Is that it?"

"No, sir; I hadn't thought of doing anything of the sort. I thought—"

"What did you think?"

"I thought I would find something to do. Of course, I do not expect to be idle. I shall work at something until school begins again next fall, then, of course, I shall not be able to do so much."

"School! You've had enough school! In my days boys didn't spend the best part of their lives in going to school. They worked."

"Yes, sir; I am willing to work, too. But, Uncle, I must have an education. I shall be able to earn so much more then, and, if necessary, I shall be able to pay you for all you have spent on me, which isn't much, you know."

"What, what? You dare to be impudent to me? You—"

"No, sir, I am not impudent. I have never been that and I never shall be; but you are accusing me wrongfully."

"Enough. You have done with school—"

"You—you mean that I am not to go to school any more—that I have got to go through life with the little I have learned? Is that what you mean, Uncle?" asked the boy, with a sinking heart.

"You heard me."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Work!"

"I am working and I shall be working," Phil replied.

"You're right you will, or you'll starve. I have been thinking this thing over a lot lately. A boy never amounts to anything if he's mollycoddled and allowed to spend his days depending on someone else. Throw him out and let him fight his own way. That's what my father used to tell me, and that's what I'm going to say to you."

"What do you mean, Uncle?"

"Mean? Can't you understand the English language? Have I got to draw a picture to make you understand? Get to work!"

"I am going to as soon as school is out."

"You'll do it now. Get yourself out of my house, bag and baggage!"

"Uncle, Uncle!" protested the lad in amazement. "Would you turn me out?"

"Would I? I have, only you are too stupid to know it. You'll thank me for it when you get old enough to have some sense."

Phil's heart sank within him, and it required all his self-control to keep the bitter tears from his eyes.

"When do you wish me to go?" he asked without a quaver in his voice.

"Now."

"Very well, I'll go. But what do you think my mother would say, could she know this?"

"That will do, young man. Do your chores, and then—"

"I am not working for you now, Uncle, you know, so I shall have to refuse to do the chores. There is fifty cents due me from Mr.

Churchill for fixing his chicken coop. You may get that, I don't want it."

Phil turned away once more, and with head erect entered the house, going straight to his room, leaving Abner Adams fuming and stamping about in the front yard. The old man's rage knew no bounds. He was so beside himself with anger over the fancied impudence of his nephew that, had the boy been present, he might have so far forgotten himself as to have used his cane on Phil.

But Phil by this time had entered his own room, locking the door behind him. The lad threw his books down on the bed, dropped into a chair and sat palefaced, tearless and silent. Slowly his eyes rose to the old-fashioned bureau, where his comb and brush lay. The eyes halted when at length they rested on the picture of his mother.

The lad rose as if drawn by invisible hands, reached out and clasped the photograph to him. Then the pent-up tears welled up in a flood. With the picture pressed to his burning cheek Phil Forrest threw himself on his bed and sobbed out his bitter grief. He did not hear the thump of Abner Adams' cane on the bedroom door, nor the angry demands that he open it.

"Mother, Mother!" breathed the unhappy boy, as his sobs gradually merged into long-drawn, trembling sighs.

Perhaps his appeal was not unheard. At least Phil Forrest sprang from his bed, holding the picture away from him with both hands and gazing into the eyes of his mother.

Slowly his shoulders drew back and his head came up, while an expression of strong determination flashed into his own eyes.

"I'll do it—I'll be a man, Mother!" he exclaimed in a voice in which there was not the slightest tremor now. "I'll fight the battle and I'll win."

Phil Forest had come to the parting of the ways, which he faced with a courage unusual in one of his years. There was little to be done. He packed his few belongings in a bag that had been his mother's. The lad possessed one suit besides the one he wore, and this he stowed away as best he could, determining to press it out when he had located himself.

Finally his task was finished. He stood in the middle of the floor glancing around the little room that had been his home for so long. But he felt no regrets. He was only making sure that he had not left anything behind. Having satisfied himself on this point, Phil gathered up his bundle of books, placed the

picture of his mother in his inside coat pocket, then threw open the door.

The lad's uncle had stamped to the floor below, where he was awaiting Phil's coming.

"Good-bye, Uncle," he said quietly, extending a hand.

"Let me see that bag," snapped the old man.

"The bag is mine—it belonged to my mother," explained the boy. "Surely you don't object to my taking it with me?"

"You're welcome to it, and good riddance; but I'm going to find out what's inside of it."

"You surely don't think I would take anything that doesn't belong to me—you can't mean that?"

"Ain't saying what I mean. Hand over that bag."

With burning cheeks, Phil did as he was bid, his unwavering eyes fixed almost sternly on the wrathful face of Abner Adams.

"Huh!" growled the old man, tumbling the contents out on the floor, shaking Phil's clothes to make sure that nothing was concealed in them.

Apparently satisfied, the old man threw the bag on the floor with an exclamation of disgust. Phil once more gathered up his belongings and stowed them away in the satchel.

"Turn out your pockets!"

"There is nothing in them, Uncle, save some trinkets of my own and my mother's picture."

"Turn them out!" thundered the old man.

"Uncle, I have always obeyed you. Obedience was one of the things that my mother taught me, but I'm sure that were she here she would tell me I was right in refusing to humiliate myself as you would have me do. There is nothing in my pockets that does not belong to me. I am not a thief."

"Then I'll turn them out myself!" snarled Abner Adams, starting forward.

Phil stepped back a pace, satchel in hand.

"Uncle, I am a man now," said the boy, straightening to his full height. "Please don't force me to do something that I should be sorry for all the rest of my life. Will you shake hands with me?"

"No!" thundered Abner Adams. "Get out of my sight before I lay the stick over your head!"

Phil stretched out an appealing hand, then hastily withdrew it.

"Good-bye, Uncle Abner," he breathed.

Without giving his uncle a chance to reply, the lad turned, opened the door and ran down the steps.

CHAPTER III

MAKING HIS START IN THE WORLD

The sun was just setting as Phil Forrest strode out of the yard. Once outside of the gate he paused, glancing irresolutely up and down the street. Which way to turn or where to go he did not know. He had not thought before of what he should do.

Phil heard the clatter of Abner Adams' stick as the old man thumped about in the kitchen.

Suddenly the door was jerked open with unusual violence.

"Begone!" bellowed Mr. Adams, brandishing his cane threateningly.

Phil turned down the street, without casting so much as a glance in the direction of his wrathful uncle, and continued on toward the open country. To anyone who had observed him there was nothing of uncertainty in the lad's walk as he swung along. As a matter of fact, Phil had not the slightest idea where he was going. He knew only that he wanted to get away by himself.

On the outskirts of the village men had been at work that day, cutting and piling up hay. The field was dotted with heaps of the fragrant, freshly garnered stuff.

Phil hesitated, glanced across the field, and, noting that the men had all gone home for the day, climbed the fence. He walked on through the field until he had reached the opposite side of it. Then the lad placed his bag on the ground and sat down on a

pile of hay.

With head in hands, he tried to think, to plan, but somehow his mind seemed unable to perform its proper functions. It simply would not work.

"Not much of a start in the world, this," grinned Phil, shifting his position so as to command a better view of the world, for he did not want anyone to see him. "I suppose Uncle Abner is getting supper now. But where am I going to get mine? I hadn't thought of that before. It looks very much as if I should have to go without. But I don't care. Perhaps it will do me good to miss a meal," decided the boy sarcastically. "I've been eating too much lately, anyhow."

Twilight came; then the shadows of night slowly settled over the landscape, while the lad lay stretched out on the sweet-smelling hay, hands supporting his head, gazing up into the starlit sky.

Slowly his heavy eyelids fluttered and closed, and Phil was asleep. The night was warm and he experienced no discomfort. He was a strong, healthy boy, so that sleeping out of doors was no hardship to him. All through the night he slept as soundly as if he had been in his own bed at home. Nor did he awaken until the bright sunlight of the morning finally burned his eyelids apart.

Phil started up rubbing his eyes.

At first he wondered where he was. But the sight of his bag lying a little to one side brought back with a rush the memory of what had happened to him the evening before.

"Why, it's morning," marveled the lad, blinking in the strong sunlight. "And I've slept on this pile of hay all night. It's the first time I ever slept out of doors, and I never slept better in my life. Guess I'll fix myself up a little."

Phil remembered that a little trout stream cut across the field off to the right. Taking up his bag, he started for the stream, where he made his toilet as best he could, finishing up by lying flat on his stomach, taking a long, satisfying drink of the sparkling water.

"Ah, that feels better," he breathed, rolling over on the bank. After a little he helped himself to another drink. "But I've got to do something. I can't stay out here in this field all the rest of my life. And if I don't find something to eat I'll starve to death. I'll go downtown and see if I can't earn my breakfast somehow."

Having formed this resolution, Phil took up his belongings and started away toward the village. His course led him right past Abner Adams' house, but, fortunately, Mr. Adams was not in sight. Phil would have felt a keen humiliation had he been forced to meet the taunts of his uncle. He hurried on past the house without glancing toward it.

He had gone on for some little way when he was halted by a familiar voice.

"Hello, Phil! Where are you going in such a hurry and so early in the morning?"

Phil started guiltily and looked up quickly at the speaker.

"Good morning, Mrs. Cahill. What time is it?"

"It's just past four o'clock in the morning."

"Gracious! I had no idea it was so early as that," exclaimed the lad.

"If you are not in such a great hurry, stop a bit," urged the woman, her keen eyes noting certain things that she did not give voice to. She had known Phil Forrest for many years, and his parents before him. Furthermore, she knew something of the life he had led since the death of his parents. "Had your breakfast?"

"Well--"

"Of course you haven't. Come right in and eat with me," urged the good-hearted widow.

"If you will let me do some chores, or something to pay for it, I will," agreed Phil hesitatingly.

"Nothing of the kind! You'll keep me company at breakfast; then you'll be telling me all about it."

"About what?"

"'Bout your going away," pointing significantly to the bag that Phil was carrying.

He was ravenously hungry, though he did not realize it fully until the odor of the widow's savory cooking smote his nostrils.

She watched him eat with keen satisfaction.

"Now tell me what's happened," urged Mrs. Cahill, after he had finished the meal.

Phil did so. He opened his heart to the woman who had known his mother, while she listened in sympathetic silence, now and then uttering an exclamation of angry disapproval when his uncle's words were repeated to her.

"And you're turned out of house and home? Is that it, my boy?"

"Well, yes, that's about it," grinned Phil.

"It's a shame."

"I'm not complaining, you know, Mrs. Cahill. Perhaps it's the best thing that could have happened to me. I've got to start out for myself sometime, you know. I'm glad of one thing, and that is that I didn't have to go until school closed. I get through the term today, you know?"

"And you're going to school today?"

"Oh, yes. I wouldn't want to miss the last day."

"Then what?"

"I don't know. I shall find something else to do, I guess. I want to earn enough money this summer so that I can go to school again in the fall."

"And you shall. You shall stay right here with the Widow Cahill until you've got through with your schooling, my lad."

"I couldn't think of that. No; I am not going to be a burden to anyone. Don't you see how I feel—that I want to earn my own living now?"

She nodded understandingly.

"You can do some chores and—"

"I'll stay here until I find something else to do," agreed Phil slowly. "I shan't be able to look about much today, because I'll be too busy at school; but tomorrow I'll begin hunting for a job. What can I do for you this morning?"

"Well, you might chop some wood if you are aching to exercise your muscles," answered the widow, with a twinkle in her eyes. She knew that there was plenty of wood stored in the woodhouse, but she was too shrewd an observer to tell Phil so, realizing, as

she did, that the obligation he felt for her kindness was too great to be lightly treated.

Phil got at his task at once, and in a few moments she heard him whistling an accompaniment to the steady thud, thud of the axe as he swung it with strong, resolute arms.

"He's a fine boy," was the Widow Cahill's muttered conclusion.

Phil continued at his work without intermission until an hour had passed. Mrs. Cahill went out, begging that he come in and rest.

"Rest? Why, haven't I been resting all night? I feel as if I could chop down the house and work it up into kindling wood, all before school time. What time is it?"

"Nigh on to seven o'clock. I've wanted to ask you something ever since you told me you had left Abner Adams. It's rather a personal question."

The lad nodded.

"Did your uncle send you away without any money?"

"Of course. Why should he have given me anything so long as I was going to leave him?"

"Did you ever hear him say that your mother had left a little money with him before she died—money that was to be used for your education as long as it lasted?"

Phil straightened up slowly, his axe falling to the ground, an expression of surprise appeared in his eyes.

"My mother left money—for me, you say?" he wondered.

"No, Phil, I haven't said so. I asked you if Abner had ever said anything of the sort?"

"No. Do you think she did?"

"I'm not saying what I think. I wish I was a man; I'd read old Abner Adams a lecture that he wouldn't forget as long as he lives."

Phil smiled indulgently.

"He's an old man, Mrs. Cahill. He's all crippled up with rheumatism, and maybe he's got a right to be cranky—"

"And to turn his own sister's child outdoors, eh? Not by a long shot. Rheumatics don't give anybody any call to do any such a thing as that. He ought to have his nose twisted, and it's me, a good church member, as says so."

The lad picked up his axe and resumed his occupation, while Mrs. Cahill turned up a chunk of wood and sat down on it, keeping up a running fire of comment, mostly directed at Abner Adams, and which must have made his ears burn.

Shortly after eight o'clock Phil gathered his books, strapped them and announced that he would be off for school.

"I'll finish the woodpile after school," he called back, as he was leaving the gate.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," retorted the Widow Cahill.

Darting out of the yard, Phil ran plump into someone, and halted sharply with an earnest apology.

"Seems to me you're in a terrible rush about something. Where you going?"

"Hello, Teddy, that you?"

"It's me," answered Teddy ungrammatically.

"I'm on my way to school."

"Never could understand why anybody should want to run when he's going to school. Now, I always run when I start off after school's out. What you doing here?" demanded the boy, drawing his eyelids down into a squint.

"I've been chopping some wood for Mrs. Cahill."

"Huh! What's the matter with the bear this morning?"

"The bear?"

Teddy jerked a significant thumb in the direction of Phil's former home.

"Bear's got a grouch on a rod wide this morning."

"Oh, you mean Uncle Abner," answered Phil, his face clouding.

"Yep."

"Why?"

"I just dropped in to see if you were ready to go to school. He yelled at me like he'd gone crazy."

"That all?" grinned the other boy.

"No. He chased me down the road till his game knee gave out; then he fell down."

Phil could not repress a broad grin at this news.

"Good thing for me that I could run. He'd have given me a walloping for sure if he'd caught me. I'll bet that stick hurts when it comes down on a fellow. Don't it, Phil?"

"I should think it would. I have never felt it, but I have had some pretty narrow escapes. What did the folks you are living with say when you got home all mud last night?"

Teddy grinned a sheepish sort of grin.

"Told me I'd better go out in the horse barn—said my particular style of beauty was better suited to the stable than to the kitchen."

"Did you?"

"Well, no, not so as you might notice it. I went down to the creek and went in swimming, clothes and all. That was the easiest way. You see, I could wash the mud off my clothes and myself all at the same time."

"It's a wonder they let you in at all, then."

"They didn't; at least not until I had wrung the water out of my trousers and twisted my hair up into a regular top-knot. Then I crawled in behind the kitchen stove and got dried out after a while. But I got my supper. I always do."

"Yes; I never knew you to go without meals."

"Sorry you ain't going to the circus tomorrow, Phil."

"I am. Teddy, I'm free. I can do as I like now. Yes, I'll go to the circus with you, and maybe if I can earn some money tonight I'll treat you to red lemonade and peanuts."

"Hooray!" shouted Teddy, tossing his hat high in the air.

CHAPTER IV

THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN

The Sparling Combined Shows came rumbling into Edmeston at about three o'clock the next morning. But, early as was the hour, two boys sat on the Widow Cahill's door-yard fence watching the wagons go by.

The circus was one of the few road shows that are now traveling through the country, as distinguished from the great modern organizations that travel by rail with from one to half a dozen massive trains. The Sparling people drove from town to town. They carried twenty-five wagons, besides a band wagon, a wild-west coach and a calliope.

"Phil! Phil! Look!" exclaimed Teddy, clutching at his companion's coat sleeve, as two hulking, swaying figures appeared out of the shadows of the early morning.

"Where?"

"There."

"Elephants! There's two of them."

"Ain't that great? I didn't suppose they'd have any elephants. Wonder if there's any lions and tigers in those big wagons."

"Of course there are. Didn't you see pictures of them on the bills, Teddy?"

"I don't know. Dan Marts, the postmaster, says you can't set any store by the pictures. He says maybe they've got the things you see in the pictures, and maybe they haven't. There's a camel! Look at it! How'd you like to ride on that hump all day?" questioned Teddy gleefully.

"Shouldn't like it at all."

"I read in my geography that they ride on them all the time on the-on-on Sarah's Desert."

"Oh, you mean the Sahara Desert—that's what you mean," laughed Phil.

"Well, maybe."

"I should rather ride an elephant. See, it's just like a rocking chair. I could almost go to sleep watching them move along."

"I couldn't," declared Teddy. "I couldn't any more go to sleep when a circus is going by than I could fly without wings."

"See, there comes a herd of ponies. Look how small they are. Not much bigger than St. Bernard dogs. They could walk right under the elephants and not touch them."

"Where do they all sleep?" wondered Teddy.

"Who, the ponies?"

"No, of course not. The people."

"I don't know unless they sleep in the cages with the animals," laughed Phil. "Some of the folks appear to be sleeping on the horses."

"I'd be willing to go without sleep if I could be a showman," mused Teddy. "Wouldn't you?"

"Sure," agreed Phil. "Hello! There come some more wagons. Come on! We'll run down to meet them."

"No; Let's go over to the grounds where the circus is coming off. They'll be putting up the tents first thing we know."

"That's so, and I want to be around. You going to work any, Teddy?"

"Not I. I'm going to see the show, but you don't catch me carrying pails of water for the elephants for a ticket of admission that don't admit you to anything except a stand-up. I can stand up cheaper than that."

Both boys slipped from the fence, and, setting off at a jog trot, began rapidly overhauling and passing the slow-moving wagons with their tired horses and more tired drivers.

By the time Teddy and Phil reached the circus grounds several wagons were already there. Shouts sprang up from all parts of the field, while half a dozen men began measuring off the ground in the dim morning light, locating the best places in which to pitch the tents. Here and there they would drive in a stake, on one of which they tied a piece of newspaper.

"Wonder what that's for," thought Phil aloud.

"Hey, what's the paper tied on the peg for?" shouted Teddy to a passing showman.

"That's the front door, sonny."

"Funniest looking front door I ever saw," grunted Teddy.

"He means that's the place where the people enter and leave their tickets."

"Oh, yes. That's what they call the 'Main Entrance,'" nodded Teddy. "I've seen it, but I don't usually go in that way."

With the early dawn figures began emerging from several of the wagons. They were a sleepy looking lot, and for a time stood about in various attitudes, yawning, stretching their arms and rubbing their eyes.

"Hey, boy, what town is this?" questioned a red-haired youth, dragging himself toward the two lads.

"Edmeston."

"Oh, yes. I remember; I was here once before."

"With a show?" asked Teddy.

"Yes, with a Kickapoo Indian medicine man. And he was bad medicine. Say, where can I wash my countenance?"

"Come on; I'll show you," exclaimed Teddy and Phil in the same breath.

They led the way to the opposite side of the field, where there was a stream of water. While the circus boy was making his morning toilet the lads watched him in admiring silence.

"What do you do?" ventured Phil.

"I perform on the rings."

"Up in the air?"

"Uh-huh."

"Ever fall off?"

"I get my bumps," grinned the red-haired boy. "My name is Rodney Palmer. What's your names?"

They told him.

"We're going to be circus men, too," Teddy informed him, but the announcement did not seem to stir a deep interest in the circus boy. He had heard other boys say the same thing. "Is it very hard work?"

"Worst ever."

"When do you sleep?"

"When we ain't awake."

"And you perform on the flying rings?"

Rodney nodded his head indifferently.

"I should think you'd burn the tent up with that head of red hair," grinned Teddy.

Instead of getting angry at the boy's thrust, Rodney glanced at Teddy with a half questioning look in his eyes, then burst out laughing.

"You're a cheerful idiot, aren't you?" he twinkled. "I'll tell you why I don't. Confidentially, you know?"

"Sure."

"I wear a wig when I'm performing. Mebby if it wasn't for that I might set something on fire. I must get over on the lot now."

"You're in a lot already," Teddy informed him.

"We call the place where we pitch the tents 'the lot.' The cook tent must be up by this time, and I'm half starved. The performance was so late yesterday afternoon that they had the cook tent down before I got my supper. Will you come along?"

They did.

"Do you think there is anything I could do to earn a ticket to the show today?" asked Phil.

"Yes, there's most always something for a boy to do."

"Whom do I ask about it?"

"Go see the boss canvasman. I'll point him out to you as we go along."

"Thank you. You want to see him, too, Teddy?"

"No; I don't have to."

"That's him over there. He's a grouch, but just don't let him bluff you. Yes, the cook tent's about ready. I'll sneak in and hook something before breakfast; then mebbe I'll come back and talk with you."

"We'll look for you in the show this afternoon," said Phil.

"All right, if I see you I'll swing my hand to you," Rodney replied, starting for the cook tent, where the meals were served to the show people.

"Now, I'm going to see that boss canvasman," announced Phil. "See, they are laying the pieces of the tents flat on the ground. I suppose they fasten them all together when they get them placed, then raise them up on the poles."

"I guess so. I don't care much so long as I don't have to do it."

"Teddy Tucker, actually you are the laziest boy I ever knew. Why don't you brace up?"

"Don't I have just as good a time and better, than you do?"

"Guess you do."

"Don't I get just as much to eat?"

"I presume so," admitted Phil.

"Don't I see all the shows that come to town, and go to all the picnics?"

"Yes."

"Then, what's the use of being any more'n lazy?"

Teddy's logic was too much for his companion, and Phil laughed heartily.

"Look, the elephant is butting one of the wagons," cried Teddy.

"No, they are using the elephant to push the cage around in place. I wonder what's in it," said Phil.

A roar that fairly made the ground shake answered Phil's question. The cage in question held a lion, and a big, ugly one if his voice was any indication. The great elephant, when the cage was being placed, would, at a signal from its keeper, place its ponderous head against one side of the cage and push, while a driver would steer the wagon by taking hold of the end of the tongue.

It was a novel sight for the two boys, and they watched it with the keenest interest. A man dressed in riding clothes, carrying a short crop in his hand, was observing the operations with equal interest. He was James Sparling, the proprietor and manager of the Great Combined Shows, but the lads were unaware of that fact. Even had they known, it is doubtful if Mr. Sparling would have been of sufficient attraction to draw their attention from the working elephant.

All at once there was a warning shout from Mr. Sparling.

The men set up a yell, followed by a sudden scurrying from the immediate vicinity of the cage that the elephant had been shunting about.

"Stop it! Brace it!" bellowed the owner of the show, making frantic motions with his free hand, cutting circles and dashes in the air with the short crop held in the other.

"What's the row?" wondered Teddy.

"I-I don't know," stammered Phil.

"The elephant's tipping the lion cage over!" shouted someone. "Run for your lives!"

For once in his life Teddy Tucker executed a lightning-like movement. He was one of several dark streaks on the landscape running as if Wallace, the biggest lion in captivity, were in reality hard upon his heels. As he ran, Teddy uttered a howl that could have been heard from one end of the circus lot to the other.

A few of the more fearless ones, the old hands of the show, did not attempt to run. Instead they stood still, fairly holding their breaths, waiting to see what would happen next.

Mr. Sparling was too far away to be able to do anything to prevent the catastrophe that was hanging over them, but it did not prevent him from yelling like a madman at the inactive employees of the show.

At the first cry—the instant he comprehended what was happening— Phil Forrest moved every bit as quickly as had his companion, though he leaped in the opposite direction.

All about on the ground lay tent poles of various length and thickness, side poles, quarter poles and the short side poles used to hold the tent walls in place. These were about twenty feet in length and light enough to be easily handled.

With ready resourcefulness and quick comprehension, Phil pounced upon one of these and darted toward the cage which was toppling over in his direction.

The roof of the lion cage that housed Wallace projected over the edge some six inches, and this had caught the keen eyes of the lad at the first alarm. His plan had been formed in a flash.

He shot one end of the side pole up under the projecting roof, jammed the other end into the ground, throwing his whole weight upon the foot of the pole to hold it in place.

For an instant the tent pole bent like a bow under the pull of the archer. It seemed as if it must surely snap under the terrific strain.

Phil saw this, too. Now that the foot of the pole was firmly imbedded in the ground, there was no further need for him to hold it down. He sprang under the pole with the swaying cage directly over him, grabbed the pole at the point where it was arching so dangerously, and pulling himself from the ground, held to the slippery stick desperately.

Light as he was the boy's weight saved the pole. It bent no further.

The cage swayed from side to side, threatening to topple over at one end or the other.

"Get poles under the ends," shouted the boy in a shrill voice. "I can't hold it here all day."

"Get poles, you lazy good-for-nothings!" bellowed the owner. "Brace those ends. Look out for the elephant. Don't you see he's headed for the cage again?"

Orders flew thick and fast, but through it all Phil Forrest hung grimly to the side pole, taking a fresh overhand hold, now and then, as his palms slipped down the painted stick.

Now that he had shown the way, others sprang to his assistance. Half a dozen poles were thrust up under the roof and the cage began slowly settling back the other way.

"Hadn't you better have some poles braced against the other side, sir?" suggested Phil, touching his hat to Mr. Sparling, who, he had discovered, was some person in authority. "The cage may tip clear over on the other side, or it may drop so heavily on the wheels as to break the axles."

"Right. Brace the off side. That's right. Now let it down slowly. Not so hard on the nigh side there. Ease off there, Bill. Push, Patsy. What do you think this is—a game of croquet? There you go. Right. Now let's see if you woodenheads know enough to keep the wagon right side up."

Mr. Sparling took off his hat and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, while Phil stood off calmly surveying the men who were straightening the wagon, but with more caution than they had exercised before.

"Come here, boy."

Someone touched Phil on the arm.

"What is it?"

"Boss wants to speak to you."

"Who?"

"Boss Sparling, the fellow over there with the big voice and the sombrero."

Phil walked over and touched his hat to Mr. Sparling.

The showman looked the lad over from head to foot.

"What's your name?" He shot the question at the lad as if angry about something, and he undoubtedly was.

"Phil Forrest."

"Do they grow your kind around here?"

"I can't say, sir."

"If they do, I'd like to hire a dozen or more of them. You've got more sense than any boy of your age I ever saw. How old are

you?"

"Sixteen."

"Huh! I wish I had him!" growled Mr. Sparling. "What do you want?"

"I should like to have a chance to earn a pass to the show this afternoon. Rodney Palmer said the boss canvasman might give me a chance to earn one."

"Earn one? Earn one?" Mr. Sparling's voice rose to a roar again. "What in the name of Old Dan Rice do you think you've been doing? Here you've kept a cage with a five-thousand-dollar lion from tipping over, to say nothing of the people who might have been killed had the brute got out, and you want to know how you can earn a pass to the show? What d'ye think of that?" and the owner appealed helplessly to an assistant who had run across the lot, having been attracted to the scene by the uproar.

The assistant grinned.

"He's too modest to live."

"Pity modesty isn't more prevalent in this show, then. How many do you want? Have a whole section if you say the word."

"How many are there in a section?" asked Phil.

" 'Bout a hundred seats."

Phil gasped.

"I-I guess two will be enough," he made answer.

"Here you are," snapped the owner, thrusting a card at the lad, on which had been scribbled some characters, puzzling to the uninitiated. "If you want anything else around this show you just ask for it, young man. Hey, there! Going to be all day getting that canvas up? Don't you know we've got a parade coming along in a few hours?"

Phil Forrest, more light of heart than in many days, turned away to acquaint his companion of his good fortune. Teddy Tucker was making his way cautiously back to the scene of the excitement of a few moments before.

"Did he get away?" Teddy questioned, ready to run at the drop of the hat should the danger prove to be still present.

"Who, the manager?"

"No, the lion."

"He's in the cage where he's been all the time. They haven't opened it yet, but I guess he's all right. Say, Teddy!"

"Say it."

"I've got a pass to the show for two people for both performances—this afternoon and tonight."

The interest that the announcement brought to Teddy's eyes died away almost as soon as it appeared.

"Going?"

"Am I going? I should say so. Want to go in with me on my pass, Teddy?"

The lad hitched his trousers, took a critical squint at the canvas that was slowly mounting the center pole to the accompaniment of creaking ropes, groaning tackle and confused shouting.

"They're getting the menagerie tent up. I'll bet it's going to be a dandy show," he vouchsafed. "How'd you get the tickets?"

"Manager gave them to me."

"What for?"

"I did a little work for him. Helped get the lion's cage straightened up. How about it—are you going in on my pass?"

"N-o-o," drawled Teddy. "Might get me into bad habits to go in on a pass. I'd rather sneak in under the tent when the boss isn't looking."

CHAPTER V

WHEN THE BANDS PLAYED

Phil started for the Widow Cahill's on the run after having procured his tickets. "Here's a ticket for the circus, Mrs. Cahill," he shouted, bursting into the room, with excited,

flushed face.

"What's this you say—the circus? Land sakes, I haven't seen one since I was—well, since I was a girl. I don't know."

"You'll go, won't you?" urged Phil.

"Of course, I'll go," she made haste to reply, noting the disappointment in his face over her hesitation. "And thank you very much."

"Shall I come and get you, Mrs. Cahill, or can you get over to the circus grounds alone?"

"Don't worry about me, my boy. I'll take care of myself."

"Your seat will be right next to mine, and we can talk while we are watching the performers."

"Yes; you run along now. Here's a quarter for spending money. Never mind thanking me. Just take it and have a good time. Where's your friend?"

"Teddy?"

"Yes."

"Over on the lot."

"He going in with you, too?"

"Oh, no. Teddy is too proud to go in that way. He crawls in under the tent," laughed Phil, running down the steps and setting off for the circus grounds with all speed.

When he arrived there he saw at once that something was going on. The tents were all in place, the little white city erected with as much care and attention to detail as if the show expected to remain in Edmeston all summer. The lad could scarcely make himself believe that, only a few hours before, this very lot had been occupied by the birds alone. It was a marvel to him, even in after years, when he had become as thoroughly conversant with the details of a great show as any man in America.

Just now there was unusual activity about the grounds. Men in gaudy uniforms, clowns in full makeup, and women with long glistening trains, glittering with spangles from head to feet, were moving about, while men were decorating the horses with bright blankets and fancy headdress.

"What are they going to do?" asked Phil of a showman.

"Going to parade."

"Oh, yes, that's so; I had forgotten about that."

"Hello, boy—I've forgotten your name—"

"Forrest," explained Phil, turning. The speaker was Mr. Sparling's assistant, whom the lad had seen just after saving the lion cage from turning over.

"Can you blow a horn as well as you can stop a wagon?"

"Depends upon what kind of a horn. I think I can make as much noise on a fish horn as anyone else."

"That'll do as well as anything else. Want to go in the parade?"

"I'd love to!" The color leaped to the cheeks of Phil Forrest and a sparkle to his eyes. This was going beyond his fondest dreams.

The assistant motioned to a clown.

"Fix this boy up in some sort of a rig. I'm going to put him in the Kazoo Band. Bring him back here when he is ready. Be quick."

A long, yellow robe was thrown about the boy, a peaked cap thrust on his head, after which a handful of powder was slapped on his face and rubbed down with the flat of the clown's hand. The fine dust got into the lad's nostrils and throat, causing him to sneeze until the tears rolled down his cheeks, streaking his makeup like a freshet through a plowed field.

"Good," laughed the clown. "That's what your face needs. You'd make a good understudy for Chief Rain-In-The-Face. Now hustle along."

Phil picked up the long skirts and ran full speed to the place where the assistant had been standing. There he waited until the assistant returned from a journey to some other part of the lot.

"That's right; you know how to obey orders," he nodded. "That's a good clown makeup. Did Mr. Miaco put those streaks on your face?"

"No, I sneezed them there," answered Phil, with a sheepish grin.

The assistant laughed heartily. Somehow, he had taken a sudden liking to this boy.

"Do you live at home, Forrest?"

"No; I have no home now."

"Here's a fish horn. Now get up in the band wagon—no, not the big one, I mean the clowns' band wagon with the hayrack on it. When the parade starts blow your confounded head off if you want to. Make all the noise you can. You'll have plenty of company. When the parade breaks up, just take off your makeup and turn it over to Mr. Miaco."

"You mean these clothes?"

"Yes. They're a part of the makeup. You'll have to wash the makeup off your face. I don't expect you to return the powder to us," grinned the assistant humorously.

The clowns were climbing to the hayrack. A bugle had blown as a signal that the parade was ready to move. Phil had not seen Teddy Tucker since returning to the lot. He did not know where the boy was, but he was quite sure that Teddy was not missing any of the fun. Tucker had been around circuses before, and knew how to make the most of his opportunities. And he was doing so now.

"Ta ra, ta ra, ta ra!" sang the bugle.

Crash! answered the cymbals and the bass drums. The snare drums buzzed a long, thrilling roll; then came the blare of the brass as the whole band launched into a lively tune such as only circus bands know how to play.

The parade had begun to move.

It was a thrilling moment—the moment of all moments of Phil Forrest's life.

The clowns' wagon had been placed well back in the line, so as not to interfere with the music of the band itself. But Phil did not care where he was placed. He only knew that he was in a circus parade, doing his part with the others, and that, so far as anyone knew, he was as much a circus man as any of them.

As the cavalcade drew out into the main street and straightened away, Phil was amazed to see what a long parade it was. It looked as if it might reach the whole length of the village.

The spring sun was shining brightly, lighting up the line, transforming it into a moving, flashing, brilliant ribbon of light and color.

"Splendid!" breathed the boy, removing the fish horn from his lips for a brief instant, then blowing with all his might again.

As the wagons moved along he saw many people whom he knew. As a matter of fact, Phil knew everyone in the village, but there were hundreds of people who had driven in from the farms whom he did not know. Nor did anyone appear to recognize him.

"If they only knew, wouldn't they be surprised?" chuckled the lad. "Hello, there's Mrs. Cahill."

The widow was standing on her front door step with a dishtowel in one hand.

In the excess of his excitement, Phil stood up, waving his horn and yelling.

She heard him—as everybody else within a radius of a quarter of a mile might have—and she recognized the voice. Mrs. Cahill brandished the dishtowel excitedly.

"He's a fine boy," she glowed. "And he's having the first good time he's had in five years."

The Widow Cahill was right. For the first time in all these years, since the death of his parents, Phil Forrest was carefree and perfectly happy.

The clowns on the wagon with him were uproariously funny. When the wagon stopped now and then, one whom Phil recognized as the head clown, Mr. Miaco, would spring to the edge of the rack and make a stump speech in pantomime, accompanied by all the gestures included in the pouring and drinking of a glass of water. So humorous were the clown's antics that the spectators screamed with laughter.

Suddenly the lad espied that which caused his own laughter to die away, and for the moment he forgot to toot the fish horn. The parade was passing his former home, and there, standing hunched forward, leaning on his stick and glaring at the procession from beneath bushy eyebrows, stood Phil's uncle, Abner Adams.

Phil's heart leaped into his throat; at least that was the sensation that he experienced.

"I—I hope he doesn't know me," muttered the lad, shrinking back a little. "But I'm a man now. I don't care. He's driven me out and he has no right to say a thing."

The lad lost some of his courage, however, when the procession halted, and he found that his wagon was directly in front of Mr. Adams' dooryard, with his decrepit uncle not more than twenty feet away from him. The surly, angry eyes of Abner Adams seemed to be burning through Phil's makeup, and the lad instinctively shrank back ever so little.

However, at that instant the boy's attention was attracted to another part of the wagon. The head clown stepped from the wagon and, with dignified tread, approached Abner Adams. He grasped the old man by the hand, which he shook with great warmth, making a courtly bow.

At first Abner Adams was too surprised to protest. Then, uttering an angry snarl, he threw the clown off, making a vicious pass at him with his heavy stick.

The clown dodged the blow, and made a run for the wagon, which was now on the move again.

Phil breathed a sigh of relief. The people had roared at the funny sight of the clown shaking hands with the crabbed old man; but to Phil Forrest there had been nothing of humor in it. The sight of his uncle brought back too many unhappy memories.

The lad soon forgot his depression, however, in the rapid changes that followed each other in quick succession as on a moving-picture film.

Reaching the end of the village street the procession was obliged to turn and retrace its steps over the same ground until it reached the business part of the town, where it would turn off and pass through some of the side streets.

Now there were two lines, moving in opposite directions. This was of interest to Phil, enabling him, as it did, to get a good look at the other members of the troupe. Mr. Sparling was riding ahead in a carriage drawn by four splendid white horses, driven by a coachman resplendent in livery and gold lace, while the bobbing plumes on the heads of the horses added to the impressiveness of the picture.

"I'd give anything in the world to be able to ride in a carriage like that," decided Phil. "Maybe someday I shall. We'll see."

Now came the elephants, lumbering along on velvet feet. On the

second one there crouched a figure that somehow seemed strangely familiar to Phil Forrest. The figure was made up to represent a huge frog.

A peculiar gesture of one of the frog's legs revealed the identity of the figure beneath the mask.

"Teddy!" howled Phil.

"Have a frog's leg," retorted Teddy, shaking one of them vigorously at the motley collection of clowns.

"Not eating frogs legs today," jeered a clown, as Teddy went swinging past them, a strange, grotesque figure on the back of the huge, hulking beast.

The clowns' wagon was just on the point of turning when the men heard a loud uproar far down the line. At first they thought it was a part of the show, but it soon became apparent that something was wrong.

Phil instinctively let the horn fall away from his lips. He peered curiously over the swaying line to learn what, if anything, had gone wrong.

He made out the cause of the trouble almost at once. A pony with a woman on its back had broken from the line, and was plunging toward them at a terrific pace. She appeared to have lost all control of the animal, and the pony, which proved to be an ugly broncho, was bucking and squealing as it plunged madly down the street.

The others failed to see what Phil had observed almost from the first. The bit had broken in the mouth of the broncho and the reins hung loosely in the woman's helpless hands.

They were almost up with the clowns' wagon when the woman was seen to sway dizzily in her saddle, as the leather slipped beneath her. Then she plunged headlong to the ground.

Instead of falling in a heap, the circus woman, with head dragging, bumping along the ground, was still fast to the pony.

"Her foot is caught in the stirrup!" yelled half a dozen men at once, but not a man of them made an effort to rescue her. Perhaps this was because none of the real horsemen of the show were near enough to do so.

Mr. Sparling, however, at the first alarm, had leaped from his carriage, and, thrusting a rider from his mount, sprang into the

saddle and came tearing down the line in a cloud of dust. He was bearing down on the scene at express train speed.

"The woman will be killed!"

"Stop him! Stop him!"

"Stop him yourself!"

But not a man made an effort to do anything.

It had all occurred in a few seconds, but rapidly as the events succeeded each other, Phil Forrest seemed to be the one among them who retained his presence of mind.

He fairly launched himself into the air as the ugly broncho shot alongside the clowns' wagon.

CHAPTER VI

PROVING HIS METTLE

Familiar as they were with daring deeds, those of the circus people who witnessed Phil Forrest's dive gasped.

They expected to see the boy fall beneath the feet of the plunging pony, where he would be likely to be trampled and kicked to death.

But Phil had looked before he leaped. He had measured his distance well—had made up his mind exactly what he was going to do, or rather what he was going to try to do.

The pony, catching a brief glimpse of the dark figure that was being hurled through the air directly toward him, made a swift leap to one side. But the animal was not quick enough. The boy landed against the broncho with a jolt that nearly knocked the little animal over, while to Phil the impact could not have been much more severe, it seemed to him, had he collided with a locomotive.

"Hang on!" howled a voice from the wagon.

That was exactly what he intended to do.

The cloud of dust, with Mr. Sparling in the center of it, had not

reached them, but his keen eyes already had observed what was going on.

"G-g-g-grab the woman!" shouted Phil.

His left arm had been thrown about the broncho's neck, while his right hand was groping frantically for the animal's nose. But during all this time the pony was far from idle. He was plunging like a ship in a gale, cracking the whip with Phil Forrest until it seemed as if every bone in the lad's body would be broken. He could hear his own neck snap with every jerk.

With a howl Miaco, the head clown, launched himself from the wagon, too. Darting in among the flying hoofs—there seemed to be a score of them—he caught the woman, jerked her foot free of the stirrup and dragged her quickly from her perilous position.

"She's free. Let go!" he roared to the boy holding the pony.

But by this time Phil had fastened his right hand on the pony's nostrils, and with a quick pressure shut off the animal's wind. He had heard the warning cry. The lad's grit had been aroused, however, and he was determined that he would not let go until he should have conquered the fighting broncho.

With a squeal of rage, the pony leaped sideways. A deep ditch led along by the side of the road, but this the enraged animal had not noticed. Into it he went, kicking and fighting, pieces of Phil's yellow robe streaming from his hoofs.

The lad's body was half under the neck of the pony, but he was clinging to the neck and the nose of the beast with desperate courage.

"Get the boy out of there!" thundered Mr. Sparling, dashing up and leaping from his pony. "Want to let him be killed?"

By this time others had ridden up, and some of the real horsemen in the outfit sprang off and rushed to Phil Forrest's assistance. Ropes were cast over the flying hoofs before the men thought it wise to get near them. Then they hauled Phil out, very much the worse for wear.

In the meantime Mr. Sparling's carriage had driven up and he was helping the woman in.

"Is the boy hurt?" he called.

"No, I'm all right, thank you," answered Phil, smiling bravely, though he was bruised from head to foot and his clothing hung in

tatters. His peaked clown's cap someone picked up in a field over the fence and returned to him. That was about all that was left of Phil Forrest's gaudy makeup, save the streaks on his face, which by now had become blotches of white and red.

The clowns picked him up and boosted him to the wagon, jabbering like a lot of sparrows perched on a telephone wire.

"See you later!" shouted the voice of Mr. Sparling as he drove rapidly away.

Phil found his horn, and despite his aches and pains he began blowing it lustily. The story of his brave rescue had gone on ahead, however, and as the clowns' wagon moved on it was greeted by tremendous applause.

The onlookers had no difficulty in picking out the boy who had saved the woman's life, and somehow the word had been passed around as to his identity.

"Hooray for Phil Forrest!" shouted the multitude.

Phil flushed under the coating of powder and paint, and sought to crouch down in the wagon out of sight.

"Here, get up there where they can see you!" admonished a clown. "If you're going to be a showman you mustn't be afraid to get yourself in the spotlight."

Two of them hoisted the blushing Phil to their shoulders and broke into a rollicking song, swaying their bodies in imitation of the movements of an elephant as they sang.

At this the populace fairly howled with delight.

"He's the boy, even if he ain't purty to look at," jeered someone in the crowd.

"Handsome is as handsome does!" retorted a clown in a loud voice, and the people cheered.

After this the parade went on without further incident, though there could be no doubt that the exciting dash and rescue by one of their own boys had aroused the town to a high pitch of excitement. And the showmen smiled, for they knew what that meant.

"Bet we'll have a turn-away this afternoon," announced a clown.

"Looks that way," agreed another, "and all on account of the kid."

"What's a turn-away?" asked Phil.

"That's when there are more people want to get in than the tent will hold. And it means, too, that the boss will be good natured till it rains again, and the wagons get stuck in the mud so that we'll make the next town behind time. At such times he can make more noise than the steam calliope."

"He seems to me to be a pretty fine sort of a man, even if he is gruff," suggested Phil.

"The best ever," agreed several clowns. "You'll look a long way before you'll find a better showman, or a better man to his help, than Jim Sparling. Ever been in the show business, kid?"

Phil shook his head.

"Anybody'd think you always had been, the way you take hold of things. I'll bet you'll be in it before you are many years older."

"I'd like to," glowed the lad.

"Ask the boss."

"No, he wouldn't want me. There is nothing I could do now, I guess."

Further conversation was interrupted by the bugle's song announcing the disbanding of the parade, the right of the line having already reached the circus lot.

The clowns piled from the hayrack like a cataract, the cataract having all the colors of the rainbow.

Phil, not to be behind, followed suit, though he did not quite understand what the rush was about. He ran until he caught up with Miaco.

"What's the hurry about?" he questioned.

"Parade's over. Got to hurry and get dinner, so as to be ready for the afternoon performance."

All hands were heading for the dressing tent in a mad rush.

Phil was halted by the assistant manager.

The lad glanced down rather sheepishly at his costume, which was hanging in tatters, then up at the quizzically smiling face of the showman.

"I-I'm sorry I've spoiled it, sir, but I couldn't help it."

"Don't worry about that, young man. How did it happen?" he questioned, pretending not to know anything about the occurrence in which Phil had played a leading part.

"Well, you see, there was a horse ran away, and I happened to get in the way of it. I—"

"Yes, Forrest, I understand all about it. Somebody did something to that animal to make it run away and the boss is red headed over it."

"I-I didn't."

"No, that's right. It was lucky that there was one person in the parade who had some sense left, or there would have been a dead woman with this outfit," growled the assistant.

"Was she badly hurt?"

"No. Only bruised up a bit. These show people get used to hard knocks."

"I'm glad she is all right. Who is she?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"That was Mr. Sparling's wife whose life you saved, and I reckon the boss will have something to say to you when he gets sight of you again."

CHAPTER VII

MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE ELEPHANTS

"Is it possible? I didn't know that," marveled the boy. "And does she perform?"

"Everybody works in this outfit, young man," laughed the assistant, "as you will learn if you hang around long enough. Going to the show?"

"Yes, sir."

"Got seats?"

"Mr. Sparling provided me with tickets, thank you. But I've got to get home first and put on some other clothes. This suit is about done for, isn't it?"

"I should say it was. You did that stopping the horse, didn't you?"

Phil nodded.

"Boss will buy you a new suit for that."

"Oh, no; I couldn't allow him to do that," objected Phil.

"Well, you are a queer youngster. So long. I'll see you when you come in this afternoon. Wait, let me see your tickets."

The lad handed them over wonderingly, at which his questioner nodded approvingly.

"They're good seats. Hope you will enjoy the show."

"Thank you; I am sure I shall," answered Phil, touching his hat and starting on a run for home.

Arriving there, Mrs. Cahill met him and threw up her hands in horror when she observed the condition of his clothes.

"I am afraid they are gone for good," grinned Phil rather ruefully.

"No. You leave them with me. I'll fix them up for you. I heard how you saved that show woman's life. That was fine, my boy. I'm proud of you, that I am. You did more than all those circus men could do, and the whole town is talking about it."

"If you are going to the show you had better be getting ready," urged Phil, wishing to change the subject.

"All right, I will. I'll fix your clothes when I get back. Will you be home to supper?"

"I don't know for sure. If I can I'll be back in time, but please don't wait for me. Here is your ticket."

The lad hurried to the room the good woman had set aside for him and quickly made the change of clothing. He was obliged to change everything he had on, for even his shirt had been torn in his battle with the broncho. After bathing and putting on the fresh clothes, Phil hurried from the house, that he might miss nothing of the show.

The sideshow band was blaring brazenly when he reached the lot. The space in front of the main entrance was packed with people, many of whom pointed to him, nodding their heads and directing the attention of their companions to the lad.

Phil wished he might be able to skulk in by the back door and thus avoid their attention, but as this was impossible, he pulled his hat down over his eyes and worked his way slowly toward the front of the crowd.

Getting near the entrance, he saw Mr. Sparling's assistant. The latter, chancing to catch sight of Phil, motioned him to crawl under the ropes and come in. The boy did so gratefully.

"The doors are not open yet, but you may go in. You will have time to look over the animals before the crowd arrives, then you can reach your seat before the others get in. Please let me see those checks once more."

The assistant made a mental note of the section and number of the seats for future reference and handed back the coupons.

Phil stole into the menagerie tent, relieved to be away from the gaze and comments of the crowd that was massed in front.

"Gracious, I'm afraid I wouldn't make a very good circus man. I hate to have everybody looking at me as if I were some natural or unnatural curiosity. Wonder if I will know any of the show people when they are made up, as they call it, and performing in the ring? I shouldn't wonder if they didn't know me in my best clothes, though," grinned the boy.

Phil had had the forethought to bring a few lumps of sugar in his pocket. Entering the menagerie tent, he quickly made his way to the place where the elephants were chained, giving each one of the big beasts a lump. He felt no fear of them and permitted them to run their sensitive trunks over him and into his pockets, where they soon found the rest of the sugar.

After disposing of the sweets, both beasts emitted a loud

trumpeting. At such close quarters the noise they made seemed to shake the ground.

"Why do they do that?" questioned Phil of the keeper.

"That's their way of thanking you for the sugar. You've made friends of both of them for life. They'll never forget you, even if they don't see you for several seasons."

"Do they like peanuts?"

"Do they? Just try them."

Phil ran to a snack stand at the opposite side of the tent and bought five cents' worth of peanuts, then hurried back to the elephants with the package.

"What are their names?"

"The big one is Emperor and the smaller one is called Jupiter," answered the keeper, who had already recognized his young visitor.

"Are they ever ugly?"

"Never have been. But you can't tell. An elephant is liable to go bad most any time, then you—"

"But how can you tell, or can't you?"

"Most always, unless they are naturally bad."

"How do you know?"

"See that little slit on the cheek up there?"

"Yes," said Phil, peering at the great jowls wonderingly.

"Well, several days before they get in a tantrum you will see a few tear drops—that's what I call them—oozing from that little slit. I don't know whether it's water on the brain or what it is. But when you see the tear drops you want to get from under and chain Mr. Elephant down as quickly as possible.

"That is strange."

"Very. But it's a sure sign. Never knew it to fail, and I've known some elephants in my time. But Emperor and Jupiter never have shed a tear drop since I've known them. They are not the

crying kind, you know.”

The lad nodded understandingly.

”How about the lions and the tigers—can you tell when they are going to have bad spells?”

”Well,” reflected the showman, ”it’s safe to say that they’ve always got a grouch on. The cats are always—”

”Cats?”

”Yes. All that sort of animals belong to the cat family and they’ve got only one ambition in life.”

”What’s that?”

”To kill somebody or something.”

”But their keepers—don’t they become fond of their keepers or trainers?”

The elephant tender laughed without changing the expression of his face. His laugh was all inside of him, as Phil characterized it.

”Not they! They may be afraid of their keeper, but they would as soon chew him up as anybody else—I guess they would rather, for they’ve always got a bone to pick with him.”

”Do any of the men go in the cages and make the animals perform here?”

”Oh, yes. Wallace, the big lion over there, performs every afternoon and night. So does the tiger in the cage next to him.”

Phil had dumped the bag of peanuts into his hat, which he held out before him while talking. Two squirming trunks had been busy conveying the peanuts to the pink mouths of their owners, so that by the time Phil happened to remember what he had brought them, there was not a nut left in the hat.

He glanced up in surprise.

”Emperor, you are a greedy old elephant,” laughed Phil, patting the trunk.

Emperor trumpeted loudly, and the call was immediately taken up even more loudly by his companion.

"No, you can't have any more," chided Phil. "You will have indigestion from what you've already eaten, I'm afraid. Behave, and I'll bring you some more tonight if I come to the show," he laughed.

Two caressing trunks touched his hands, then traveled gently over his cheeks. They tickled, but Phil did not flinch.

"You could do most anything with them now, you see," nodded the keeper. "They'd follow you home if I would let them."

"Especially if my pockets were full of sweets."

"There's the animal trainer getting ready to go into the lion cage, if you want to see him," the attendant informed him.

"Yes, I should like to. And thank you very much for your kindness."

"You're welcome. Come around again."

The boy hurried over to the lion cage. The people were now crowding into the menagerie tent in throngs. There seemed to Phil to be thousands already there. But all eyes now being centered on Wallace's cage, they had no time to observe Phil, for which he was duly thankful.

The animal trainer, clad in red tights, his breast covered with spangles, was already at the door of the cage, whip in hand. When a sufficient crowd had gathered about him, he opened the door, and, entering the cage threw wide the iron grating that shut Wallace off from the door end of the wagon. The big lion bounded out with a roar that caused the people to crowd back instinctively.

Then the trainer began putting the savage beast through its paces, causing it to leap over his whip, jump through paper hoops, together with innumerable other tricks that caused the spectators to open their mouths in wonder. All the time Wallace kept up a continual snarling, interspersed now and then with a roar that might have been heard a quarter of a mile away.

This was a part of the exhibition, as Phil shrewdly discovered. The boy was a natural showman, though unaware of the fact. He noted all the little fine points of the trainer's work with as much appreciation as if he had himself been an animal trainer.

"I half believe I should like to try that myself," was his mental conclusion. "But I should want to make the experiment on a very little lion at first. If I got out with a whole skin I might

want to tackle something bigger. I wonder if he is going into the tiger cage?"

As if in answer to his question, an announcer shouted out the information that the trainer would give an exhibition in the cage of the tiger just before the evening performance.

"I'll have to see that," muttered Phil. "Guess I had better get in and find my seat now."

At the same time the crowd, understanding that the lion performance was over, began crowding into the circus tent.

The band inside swung off into a sprightly tune and Phil could scarcely repress the inclination to keep time to it with his feet. Altogether, things were moving pretty well with Phil Forrest. They had done so ever since he left home the day before. In that one day he had had more fun than had come to him in many years.

But his happy day would soon be ended. He sighed as he thought of it. Then his face broke out into a sunny smile as he caught a glimpse of the ropes and apparatus, seen dimly through the afternoon haze, in the long circus tent.

As he gained the entrance between the two large tents he saw the silk curtains at the far end of the circus arena fall apart, while a troop of gayly caparisoned horses and armored riders suddenly appeared through the opening.

The grand entry was beginning.

"Gracious, here the show has begun and I am not anywhere near my seat," he exclaimed. "But, if I am going to be late I won't be alone. There are a whole lot more of us that were too much interested in the animal trainer to think to come in and get our seats. I guess I had better run. I—"

Phil started to run, but he got no further than the start.

All at once his waist was encircled in a powerful grip and he felt his feet leaving the ground. Phil was being raised straight up into the air by some strange force, the secret of which he did not understand.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE SAWDUST ARENA

The lad repressed an inclination to cry out, for the thing that had encircled his waist and raised him up seemed to be tightening about him.

A familiar voice just behind him served to calm Phil's disquieted nerves.

"Don't be frightened, kid. It's only Emperor having a little joke. He's a funny fellow," said the elephant's attendant.

Phil had read somewhere that elephants possessed a keen sense of humor, and now he was sure of it. But he never thought he would have an opportunity to have the theory demonstrated on himself.

The elephants were on their way to participate in the grand entry, and there was not a minute to spare now. Emperor on his way into the other tent had come across his new-found friend and recognized him instantly, while Phil had not even heard the approach of the elephants.

No sooner had the elephant discovered the lad than he picked him up with his trunk, slowly hoisting the boy high in the air.

"Steady, Emperor! Steady!" cautioned the attendant. But Emperor needed no admonition to deal gently with his young friend. He handled Phil with almost the gentleness of a mother lifting a babe.

Phil Forrest experienced a thrill that ran all through him when he realized what was taking place.

"We can't stop to put you down now, my boy. You'll have to go through the performance with us. Grab the head harness when he lets you down on his head. You can sit on the head without danger, but keep hold of the harness with one hand. I'll bet you'll make a hit."

"I will if I fall off," answered Phil a bit unsteadily.

As it was, the unusual motion made him a little giddy.

"That's a good stunt. Stick to him, Forrest," directed a voice as they swept on toward the ring.

The voice belonged to Mr. Sparling, the owner of the show. He was quick to grasp the value of Phil's predicament—that is, its value to the show as a drawing card.

By now the people began to understand that something unusual was going on, and they asked each other what it was all about.

"It's Phil Forrest riding the elephant," shouted one of the lad's school friends, recognizing him all at once. "Hooray for Phil!"

There were many of the pupils from his school there, and the howling and shouting that greeted him made the lad's cheeks burn. But now, instead of wanting to crawl under something and hide, Phil felt a thrill of pleasure, of pride in the achievement that was denied to all the rest of his friends.

The inspiring music of the circus band, too, added to his exhilaration. He felt like throwing up his hands and shouting.

Suddenly he felt something tugging at his coat pocket, and glancing down gave a start as he discovered the inquisitive trunk of Emperor thrust deep down in the pocket.

When the trunk came away it brought with it a lump of sugar that Phil did not know he possessed. The sugar was promptly conveyed to the elephant's mouth, the beast uttering a loud scream of satisfaction.

"Emperor, you rascal!" laughed Phil, patting the beast on the head.

Once more the trunk curled up in search of more sugar, but a stern command from the trainer caused the beast to lower it quickly. The time for play had passed. The moment had arrived for Emperor to do his work and he was not the animal to shirk his act. In fact, he seemed to delight in it. All elephants work better when they have with them some human being or animal on which they have centered their affections. Sometimes it is a little black and tan dog, sometimes a full-grown man. In this instance it happened to be a boy, and that boy Phil Forrest.

"Waltz!" commanded the trainer.

If Phil's head had swum before, it spun like a top now. Round and round pirouetted the huge beasts, keeping in perfect step with the music of the band, and tighter and tighter did the lad grip the head harness of old Emperor. Phil closed his eyes after a little because he had grown so dizzy that he feared he would fall off.

"Hang on, kid. It'll be Christmas by and by," comforted the trainer humorously.

"That's what I am trying to do," answered Phil a bit unsteadily.

"How's your head?"

"Whirling like a merry-go-round."

He heard the trainer chuckling.

The spectators were shouting out Phil's name all over the big tent.

"Fine, fine!" chuckled James Sparling, rubbing his palms together. "That ought to fill the tent tonight."

The spectators realized, too, that they were being treated to something not down on the bills and their shouts and laughter grew louder and louder.

"Do you think you could stand up on his head?" came the voice of the trainer just loud enough for Phil to hear.

"Me? Stand on the elephant's head?"

"Yes. Think you can do it?"

"If I had a net underneath to catch me, maybe I'd try it."

"Emperor won't let you fall. When I give the word he'll wrap his trunk around your legs. That will hold you steady from the waist down. If you can keep the rest of yourself from lopping over you'll be all right. It'll make a hit—see if it don't."

"I—I'll try it."

"Wait till I give the word, then get up on all fours, but don't straighten up till you feel the trunk about you. We'll make a showman of you before you know it."

"I seem to be the whole show as it is," grumbled Phil.

"You are, just now—you and Emperor. Good thing the other performers are not in the ring, or they would all be jealous of you."

"I wish Uncle Abner could see me now. Wouldn't he be mad!" grinned Phil, as the memory of his crabbed relative came back to him. "He'd come right out after me with his stick, he'd be so

angry. But I guess Emperor wouldn't let him touch me," decided the boy proudly, with an affectionate pat to which the elephant responded with a cough that sounded not unlike the explosion of a dynamite cartridge.

"All ready now. Don't be afraid. Hold each position till I give you the word to change it."

"Ready," announced the lad.

"Emperor! Jupiter!"

The twitching of a ponderous ear of each animal told that they had heard and understood.

"Rise!"

Phil had scrambled to all fours.

"Hold him, Emperor!"

The great trunk curled up, ran over the boy's legs and twined about them.

"Up you go, kid!"

Phil raised himself fearlessly, straightened and stood full upon his feet. That strong grip on his legs gave him confidence and told him he had nothing to fear. All he would have to do would be to keep his ears open for the trainer's commands both to himself and the beast, and he would be all right.

He felt himself going up again.

The sensation was something akin to that which Phil had once experienced when jumping off a haystack. He felt as if his whole body were being tickled by straws.

The elephants were rising on their hind legs, uttering shrill screams and mighty coughs, as if enraged over the humiliation that was being put upon them.

It seemed to Phil as if Emperor would never stop going up until the lad's head was against the top of the tent. He ventured to look down.

What a distance it was! Phil hastily directed his glances upward.

At last the elephant had risen as high as he could go. He was standing almost straight up and down, and on his head the slender figure of the boy appeared almost unreal to those off on the seats.

Thunders of applause swept over the assemblage. People rose up in their seats, the younger ones hurling hats high in the air and uttering catcalls and shrill whistles, until pandemonium reigned under the "big top," as the circus tent proper is called by the showmen.

"Swing your hat at them!"

The trainer had to shout to make himself heard, and as it was Phil caught the words as from afar off.

He took off his soft hat and waved it on high, gazing wonderingly off over the seats. He could distinguish nothing save a waving, undulating mass of moving life and color.

It was intoxicating. And Phil Forrest went suddenly dizzy again.

"I'm losing my head," rebuked the lad. "If I don't pull myself together I shall surely fall off. Then they will have something to laugh at rather than to applaud."

He took himself firmly in hand. But the applause did not abate one whit.

"Watch out, we're going down," warned the trainer.

"Right!"

The elephant trainer's command came out like the crack of a ringmaster's whip.

Slowly the great beasts lowered themselves toward the sawdust ring.

"Stoop over and grab the harness!"

Phil did so.

"Sit! Let go, Emperor!"

The trunk was released instantly and Phil plumped to the beast's head once more, amid the wildest applause.

The band swung into another tune, which was the signal for the next act to be brought on. At the same time the ringmaster blew

a shrill blast on his whistle.

The trainer left the ring with his charges by an exit that he seldom departed through. But he did so in order to leave Phil near the place where his seats were, first having ascertained where these were located.

"Put him down, Emperor! Down, I say!"

Emperor reached up an unwilling trunk, grasped Phil about the waist and stood him on the ground. At the trainer's command the beast released his hold of his friend and as the hook was gently pressed against his side to hurry him, Emperor started reluctantly away.

Phil, with flushed face, a happy look in his eyes, had turned to run up the aisle to his seats, when, with a loud trumpeting, Emperor wheeled, and breaking away from his trainer, swept down toward the spot where he had left Phil Forrest.

The movement almost threw those in that section into a panic. Women screamed, believing the animal had suddenly gone crazy, while men sprang to their feet.

Phil had turned at the first alarm, and, observing what was taking place, with rare presence of mind trotted down to the arena again.

He reached there about the same time that Emperor did.

With a shrill scream Emperor threw his long trunk about the lad, and before Phil had time to catch his breath, he had been hurled to the elephant's back.

Uttering loud trumpeting the great elephant started on a swift shamble for his quarters, giving not the slightest heed to his trainer's commands to halt.

CHAPTER IX

GETTING HIS FIRST CALL

"Let him go. Emperor won't hurt me," laughed Phil as soon as he could get his breath, for he was moving along at a pace which would have meant a tumble to the ground had the elephant not supported the lad with its trunk.

The audience soon seeing that no harm had come to the boy, set up another roar, which was still loud in Phil's ears when Emperor set his burden down after reaching the elephant quarters in the menagerie tent.

"You're a bad boy. Get down, sir, and let me off," chided Phil.

The elephant, to his surprise, cautiously let himself down to his knees, his trunk at the same time reaching out surreptitiously for a wisp of fresh grass.

Phil slipped off, laughing heartily. He had lost all fear of the great, hulking beast.

"Don't punish him, please," begged the boy when the keeper came hurrying along with Jupiter. "But if you will make him let me alone, I'll go in the other tent. I want to see the circus."

"Wait a moment. I'll chain him up."

The keeper soon had Emperor fast. Then after a final affectionate petting Phil ran lightly to the other tent and quickly made his way to his seat. The people were so engrossed in the acts in the ring that they did not observe the boy particularly this time.

"Did I make a show of myself, Mrs. Cahill?" questioned the lad, with sparkling eyes.

"You did not. You were as handsome as a picture. There isn't one of all those people that looks so handsome or so manly as—"

"Please, please, Mrs. Cahill!" begged the lad, blushing violently. "Have you seen anything of my friend Teddy? I had forgotten all about him."

"That looks like him down there."

"Where?"

"There, leaning against that pole," she pointed.

Phil gazed in the direction indicated, and there, sure enough, was Teddy Tucker leaning carelessly against the center pole. He had no right to be there, as Phil well knew, and he watched with amused interest for the moment when the other boy's presence would be discovered.

It came shortly afterwards. All at once the ringmaster fixed a cold eye on Teddy.

"Hey, you!"

Teddy gave no heed to him.

"Get out of there! Think you own this show?"

The lad made believe that he did not hear.

The ringmaster's long whip lash curled through the air, going off with a crack that sounded as if a pistol had been fired, and within an inch of Teddy's nose.

Teddy sprang back, slapping a hand to his face, believing that he had been hit. Then there followed a series of disconcerting snaps all around his head as the long lash began to work, but so skillfully was it wielded that the end of it did not touch him.

But Teddy had had enough. He turned and ran for the seats.

"Come up here," cried Phil, laughing immoderately. "Here's a seat right beside us and there won't be any ringmaster to bother you."

Considerably crestfallen, the lad climbed up to where Phil and Mrs. Cahill were sitting.

"You mustn't go down there, you know, Teddy. They don't allow outsiders in the ring while the performance is going on. Someone might get hurt—"

"They let you in," bristled Teddy.

"That was different. They couldn't help themselves, and neither could I. Emperor took me in whether I would or not; and, in fact, I didn't know I was going till I was halfway there."

Phil's companion surveyed him with admiration.

"My, but you did cut a figure up on that elephant's head! I should have been afraid."

"There was nothing to be afraid of. But let's watch the performance. There's a trapeze act going on now."

For a few moments the lads watched the graceful bodies of the performers slipping through the air. One would swing out from his perch, flying straight into the arms of his fellow-performer

who was hanging head down from another swinging bar. On the return sweep the first performer would catch his own bar and return to his perch.

"Looks easy. I'll bet I could do that," nodded Teddy.

Phil shook his head.

"Not so easy as it looks."

"How much do you suppose they get—think they must get as much as a dollar and a half a day for doing that? I'd do it for a dollar, if I could," averred the irrepressible Teddy Tucker.

"They get a good many more dollars than that, Teddy. I've heard that some of them get all of twenty-five or thirty dollars a week."

Phil's companion whistled.

The next act was a bareback riding exhibition, by a pretty, graceful young woman whom the ringmaster introduced as Mademoiselle Mora.

At the crack of the whip she sprang lightly to the back of the gray old ring horse and began a series of feats that made the boys sit forward in their seats.

At the conclusion of the act Mademoiselle Mora ran out to the edge of the ring, and blowing a kiss at the blushing Phil, tripped away on fairy feet for the dressing tent.

"Did you see her? She bowed to me?" exclaimed Teddy enthusiastically.

"Guess she didn't see you at all, young man," replied Mrs. Cahill dryly. "There's others in the tent besides you, even if the ringmaster did crack his whip in your face and just miss your nose."

A clown came out and sang a song about a boy who had rescued a beautiful young woman from a runaway horse and got kidnaped by an elephant. The song made a hit, for most of the audience understood that it referred to Phil Forrest.

And so the performance went on, with a glitter and a crash, a haze of yellow dust hanging like a golden cloud in the afternoon sun, over spectators and performers alike.

"Hello, there's Rod!" exclaimed Teddy.

"Who?"

"Rod. The red-haired kid we saw this morning, only his hair is black now. He's covered up his own looks so he won't set the tent on fire."

"Oh, you mean Rodney Palmer? Yes, I guess that is he."

"See, they're pulling him up on a rope. I wonder where he is going?"

"To those flying rings," explained Phil. "And there is a young woman going up, too."

One after another was pulled up, until a troupe of four had ascended and swung off to the rings that were suspended far up there in the haze.

Both Phil and Teddy were more than ordinarily interested in this act, for they were no mean performers on the rings themselves. In the schoolyard an apparatus had been rigged with flying rings, and on this the boys had practiced untiringly during the spring months, until they had both become quite proficient.

"Isn't he great?" breathed Teddy, as Rodney Palmer swung out into the air, letting his legs slip through the rings until only his toes were hanging to the slender support.

"Yes; he certainly does do it fine."

"We can do it just as well."

"Perhaps, but not so gracefully."

"See, he's swinging his hand at us."

Sure enough, Rodney had picked out the two lads, and was smiling at them and waving a hand in their direction. The two lads felt very proud of this, knowing as they did that they were the envy of every boy of their acquaintance within sight of them.

The climax of the act was when the young woman seemed to plunge straight down toward the ground.

The women in the audience uttered sharp little cries of alarm. But the performer was not falling. Strong slender ropes had been fastened to her heels, the other ends being held by one of the

performers who was hanging from the rings.

As a result the falling girl's flight was checked just before she reached the ground and the spectators breathed a sigh of profound relief.

"My, that was great! I wouldn't want to do that."

"No, you're too heavy, Teddy. That's why they have a girl do it. She is slender and light—"

"I'd be light headed."

"Guess, I would, too," laughed Phil.

At this juncture an attendant came running up the steps, halting before the lads.

"Are you Phil Forrest?" he asked.

"Yes."

"The boss wants to see you."

"Mr. Sparling? All right. I wanted to see the rest of the show, but I'll go." Phil rose reluctantly and followed the guide. "I'll meet you by the ticket wagon if I don't get back here, Teddy," he said.

CHAPTER X

PHIL GETS A SURPRISE

"Where will I find Mr. Sparling?"

"In the doghouse."

"Where's that?"

"Out back of the ticket wagon. It's a little A tent, and we call it the boss's doghouse, because it's only big enough to hold a couple of St. Bernards."

"Oh! What does he want of me?"

"Ask him," grinned the attendant, who, it developed, was an usher in the reserved-seat section. "He don't tell us fellows his business. Say, that was a great stunt you did with Emperor."

"Oh, I don't know."

"I do. There's the doghouse over there. See it?"

"Yes, thank you."

The attendant leaving him, Phil walked on alone to Mr. Sparling's private office, for such was the use to which he put the little tent that the usher had called the "doghouse."

"I wonder what he can want of me?" mused Phil. "Probably he wants to thank me for stopping that pony. I hope he doesn't. I don't like to be thanked. And it wasn't much of anything that I did anyway. Maybe he's going to—but what's the use of guessing?"

The lad stepped up to the tent, the flaps of which were closed. He stretched out his hand to knock, then grinned sheepishly.

"I forgot you couldn't knock at a tent door. I wonder how visitors announce themselves, anyway."

His toe, at that moment, chanced to touch the tent pole and that gave him an idea. Phil tapped against the pole with his foot.

"Come in!" bellowed the voice of the owner of the show.

Phil entered, hat in hand. At the moment the owner was busily engaged with a pile of bills for merchandise recently purchased at the local stores, and he neither looked up nor spoke.

Phil stood quietly waiting, noting amusedly the stern scowl that appeared to be part of Mr. Sparling's natural expression.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded, with disconcerting suddenness.

"I—I was told that you had sent for me, that you wanted to see me," began the lad, with a show of diffidence.

"So I did, so I did."

The showman hitched his camp chair about so he could get a better look at his visitor. He studied Phil from head to foot with his usual scowl.

"Sit down!"

"On the ground, sir?"

"Ground? No, of course not. Where's that chair? Oh, my lazy tent man didn't open it. I'll fire him the first place we get to where he won't be likely to starve to death. I hear you've been trying to put my show out of business."

"I wasn't aware of it, sir," replied Phil, looking squarely at his questioner. "Perhaps I was not wholly blameless in attaching myself to Emperor."

"Huh!" grunted Mr. Sparling, but whether or not it was a grunt of disapproval, Phil could not determine.

"So you're not living at home?"

"I have no home now, sir."

"Just so, just so. Brought up in refined surroundings, parents dead, crabbed old uncle turned you out of doors for reasons best known to himself--"

Phil was amazed.

"You seem to know all about me, sir."

"Of course. It's my business to know something about everything. I ought to thank you for getting Mrs. Sparling out of that mix-up this morning, but I'll let her do that for herself. She wants to see you after the performance."

"I don't like to be thanked, Mr. Sparling, though I should like to know Mrs. Sparling," said Phil boldly.

"Neither do I, neither do I. Emperor has gone daffy over you. What did you feed him?"

"Some sugar and peanuts. That was all."

"Huh! You ought to be a showman."

"I have always wanted to be, Mr. Sparling."

"Oh, you have, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, why don't you?"

"I have never had the opportunity."

"You mean you've never looked for an opportunity. There are always opportunities for everything, but we have to go after them. You've been going after them today for the first time, and you've nailed one of them clear up to the splice of the center pole. Understand?"

"Not entirely, sir."

"Well, do you want to join out with the Great Sparling Combined Shows, or don't you?"

"You mean—I join the—the—"

Mr. Sparling was observing him narrowly.

"I said, would you like to join our show?"

"I should like it better than anything else in the world."

"Sign this contract, then," snapped the showman, thrusting a paper toward Phil Forrest, at the same time dipping a pen in the ink bottle and handing it to him.

"You will allow me to read it first, will you not?"

"Good! That's the way I like to hear a boy talk. Shows he's got some sense besides what he's learned in books at some—well, never mind."

"What—what is this, ten dollars a week?" gasped Phil, scarcely able to believe his eyes as he looked at the paper.

"That's what the contract says, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, that's what it is. Traveling expenses and feed included. You are an easy keeper?"

"Well, I don't eat quite as much as a horse, if that's what you mean," laughed Phil.

"Huh!"

After reading the contract through, the lad affixed his signature to it with trembling hand. It was almost too good to be true.

"Thank you, sir," he said, laying the paper before Mr. Sparling.

"And now, my lad," added the showman more mildly, "let me give you some advice. Some folks look upon circus people as rough and intemperate. That day's past. When a man gets bad habits he's of no further use in the circus business. He closes mighty quick. Remember that."

"Yes, sir. You need not worry about my getting into any such trouble."

"I don't, or I wouldn't take you. And another thing: Don't get it into your head, as a good many show people do, that you know more about running the business than the boss does. He might not agree with you. It's a bad thing to disagree with the boss, eh?"

"I understand, sir."

"You'd better."

"What do you want me to do? I don't know what I can do to earn that salary, but I am willing to work at whatever you may put me to—"

"That's the talk. I was waiting for you to come to that. But leave the matter to me. You'll have a lot of things to do, after you get your bearings and I find out what you can do best. As it is, you have earned your salary for the first season whether you do anything else or not. You saved the big cat and you probably saved my wife's life, but we'll let that pass. When can you join out?"

"I'm ready now, sir. I shall want to go home and get my things and my books."

"Huh! That's right. Take your time. We shan't be pulling out of here till after midnight, so you'd better go home and get ready. You'll want to bid good-bye to Mrs. Ca-Ca-Cahill."

"I wonder if there is anything that he doesn't know about," marveled Phil.

"Anything you want to ask me about—any favor you'd like? If there is, get it out."

"Well, yes, there is, but I scarcely feel like asking it, you have been so kind to me."

"Shucks!"

"I-I have a little friend, who-who, like myself, has no parents and is crazy over the circus. He wants to be a circus man just as much as I do. If you had a place-if you could find something for him to do, I should appreciate it very much."

"Who is he, that youngster with the clown face, who crawled in under the tent this afternoon?"

Phil laughed outright.

"I presume so. That's the way he usually gets in."

"Where is he now?"

"Seeing the performance, sir."

"Nail him when he comes out. We'll give him all the show he wants."

With profuse thanks Phil Forrest backed from the tent and walked rapidly toward the entrance. It seemed to him as if he were walking on air.

"Let that boy through. He's with the show now," bellowed Mr. Sparling, poking his head from the doghouse tent.

The gateman nodded.

"How soon will the performance be over?" inquired Phil, approaching the gateman.

"Ten minutes now."

"Then, I guess I won't go in. I promised to meet Teddy over by the ticket wagon anyway."

But Phil could not stand still. Thrusting his hands in his pockets he began pacing back and forth, pondering deeply. He did not observe the shrewd eyes of Mr. Sparling fixed upon him from behind the flap of the little tent.

"At last, at last!" mused Phil. "I'm a real live showman at last, but what kind of a showman I don't know. Probably they'll make me help put up the tents and take them down. But, I don't care. I'll do anything. And think of the money I'll earn. Ten dollars a week!" he exclaimed, pausing and glancing up at the fluttering flags waving from center and quarter poles. "Why, it's a fortune! I shall be able to save most all of it, too. Oh,

I'm so happy!"

"They're coming out," called the gateman to him.

"Thank you."

Phil's face was full of repressed excitement when Teddy came slouching up to him.

"Bully show," announced the lad. "Didn't know which way to look, there was so much to be seen."

"How would you like to join the show and be a real circus man?" demanded Phil.

"Great!"

"Maybe I can fix it for you."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Don't give me such a shock, Phil. You said it almost as if you meant it."

"And I did."

Teddy gazed at his companion for a full minute.

"Something's been going on, I guess—something that I don't seem to know anything about."

"There has, Teddy. I'm already a showman. You come with me. Mr. Sparling wants to speak with you. Don't be afraid of him. He talks as if he was mad all the time, but I'm sure he isn't."

Grasping Teddy by the arm Phil rushed him into Mr. Sparling's tent, entering this time without knocking.

"This is my friend whom I spoke to you about," announced Phil, thrusting Teddy up before the showman.

Mr. Sparling eyed the lad suspiciously.

"Want to join out, too, eh?"

"I-I'd like to," stammered Teddy.

"Do your parents approve of your going with a show?"

"I-I don't know, sir."

"You'd better find out, then. Ask them mighty quick. This is no camp meeting outfit that plays week stands."

"Can't."

"Why not?"

" 'Cause they're dead."

"Huh! Why didn't you say so before?"

"You didn't ask me."

"You're too smart, young man."

"Takes a smart man to be a circus man, doesn't it?"

"I guess you're right at that," answered the showman, his stern features relaxing into a smile. "You'll do. But you'd better not hand out that line of sharp talk in bunches when you get with the show. It might get you into trouble if you did."

"Yes, sir; I'll be good."

"Now, you boys had better run along and make your preparations. You may take your supper in the cook tent tonight if you wish. But you will have to be on hand promptly, as they take down the cook tent first of all."

"Thank you; we will," answered Phil.

"What act-what do I perform?" questioned Teddy, swelling with pride.

"Perform?"

"Yes."

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"I'm going to be a performer and wear pink pants, ain't I?"

"A performer? Oh, that's too good. Yes, my son, you shall be a performer. How would you like to be a juggler?"

"Fine!"

"Then, I think I'll let you juggle the big coffeepot in the cook tent for the edification of the hungry roustabouts," grinned Mr. Sparling.

"What do I do?"

"Do, young man—do?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, you stand by the coffee boiler in the cook tent, and when you hear a waiter bawl 'Draw one,' at the same time throwing a pitcher at you from halfway across the tent, you catch the pitcher and have it filled and ready for him by the time he gets to you."

"Do I throw the pitcherful of coffee back at him?" questioned Teddy innocently.

"You might, but you wouldn't be apt to try it a second time. You'd be likely to get a resounding slap from the flat of his hand—"

"I'd hit him on the nose if he did," declared Teddy belligerently.

Mr. Sparling could not resist laughing.

"That's not the way to begin. But you will learn. Follow your friend Phil, here, and you will be all right if I am any judge of boys. I ought to be, for I have boys of my own. You'd better be going now."

The two lads started off at a brisk pace. Phil to tell Mrs. Cahill of his good fortune. Teddy to bid good-bye to the people with whom he had been living as chore boy.

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST NIGHT WITH THE SHOW

"Teddy, you and I are a pair of lucky boys. Do you know it?" asked Phil.

Each, with his bag of belongings, was on his way to the circus lot, the boys having bid good-bye to their friends in the village.

The people with whom Teddy lived had given a reluctant consent to his going with the circus, after he had explained that Phil Forrest had gotten him the place and that Phil himself was going to join the show. The lad told them he was going to make a lot of money and that someday he would pay them for all they had done for him. And he kept his word faithfully.

"Maybe. I reckon Barnum & Bailey will be wanting us first thing we know," answered Teddy.

"We shall be lucky if we hold on to the job we have already. Did Mr. Sparling say what he would pay you?"

"No, he didn't think of that—at least I didn't. Did he tell you how much you were going to get?"

Phil nodded.

"How much?"

"I don't think I had better say," answered the lad doubtfully. "If you ask him and he tells you, of course that will be all right. I shall be glad to do so then. It isn't that I don't want you to know, you understand, but it might be better business, just now, to say nothing about it," added Phil, with a wisdom far beyond his years.

"Dark secret, eh?" jeered Teddy Tucker.

"No; there's no secret about it. It is just plain business, that's all."

"Business! Huh! Who ever heard of a circus being business?"

"You'll find business enough when you get in, Teddy Tucker."

"Don't believe it. It's just good fun and that's all."

They had reached the circus lot by this time and were now making their way to Mr. Sparling's tent.

"We have come to report, sir," announced Phil, entering the tent with Teddy close behind him. "We are ready for work."

There was a proud ring in Phil Forrest's voice as he made the announcement.

"Very well, boys. Hand your baggage over to the man at the baggage wagon. If there is anything in either of your grips that you will want during the night you had better get it out, for you will be unable to get into the wagon after the show is on the road. That's one of the early wagons to move, too."

"I guess there is nothing except our tooth brushes and combs that we shall need. We have those in our pockets."

"Better take a couple of towels along as well."

"Yes, sir; thank you."

"The cook tent is open. Go over and have your suppers now. Wait a moment, I'll go with you. They might not let you in. You see, they don't know you there yet."

Mr. Sparling, after closing and locking his trunk, escorted the lads to the cook tent, where he introduced both to the manager of that department.

"Give them seats at the performers' table for tonight," he directed. "They will be with the show from now on. Mr. Forrest here will remain at that table, but the other, the Tucker boy, I shall probably turn over to you for a coffee boy."

The manager nodded good naturedly, taking quick mental measure of the two lads.

The boys were directed to their seats, which they took, almost as if in a dream. It was a new and unfamiliar experience to them. The odor of the food, the sweet scents from the green grass underneath their feet, all so familiar to the showman, gave Phil and Teddy appetites that even a canvasman might have envied.

The performers glanced at them curiously, some of the former nodding to Phil, having recognized in him the boy who had ridden the elephant into the arena in the grand entry.

"Not so much after all, are they?" grunted Teddy.

"They are all human beings like ourselves, I guess," replied Phil.

Stripped of their gaudy costumes and paint, the performers looked just like other normal beings. But instead of talking about the show and their work, they were discussing the news of the day, and it seemed to the two lads to be more like a large family at

supper than a crowd of circus performers.

Rodney Palmer nodded good naturedly to them from further up the long table, but they had no more than time to nod back when a waiter approached to take their orders. Teddy ordered pretty much everything on the bill, while Phil was more modest in his demands.

"Don't eat everything they have," he warned laughingly.

"Plenty more where this came from. That's one good thing about a show."

"What's that?"

"If the food gives out they can eat the animals."

"Better look out that the animals don't make a meal of you."

"Joining out?" asked the man sitting next to Phil.

"Yes, sir."

"Ring act?"

"I don't know yet what I am to do. Mr. Sparling is giving me a chance to find out what I am good for, if anything," smiled Phil.

"Boss is all right," nodded the circus man. "That was a good stunt you did this afternoon. Why don't you work that up?"

"I'll think about it." Phil did not know exactly what was meant by the expression, but it set him to thinking, and out of the suggestion he was destined to "work up" something that was really worthwhile, and that was to give him his first real start in the circus world.

"What's that funny-looking fellow over there doing?" interrupted Teddy.

"That man down near the end of the table?"

"Yes."

"That's Billy Thorpe, the Armless Wonder," the performer informed him.

"And he hasn't any hands?" wondered the boy.

"Naturally not, not having any arms. He uses his feet for hands."

"What's he doing now?"

"Eating with his feet. He can use them almost as handily as you can your hands. You should see Billy sew, and write and do other things. Why, they say he writes the best foot of anybody in the show."

"Doesn't he ever get cold feet?" questioned Teddy humorously.

"Circus people are not afflicted with that ailment. Doesn't go well with their business."

"May I ask what you do?" inquired Phil.

"I am the catcher in the principal trapeze act. You may have seen me today. I think you were in the big top then."

"Oh, yes, I saw you this afternoon."

"How many people are with the show?" asked Teddy.

"At a rough guess, I should say a hundred and fifty including canvasmen and other labor help. It's a pretty big organization for a road show, the biggest in the country; but it's small, so small it would be lost if one of the big railroad shows was around."

"Is that another armless or footless wonder next to Billy Thorpe?" asked Teddy.

"It's a freak, yes, but with hands and feet. That's the living skeleton, but if he keeps on eating the way he's been doing lately the boss will have to change the bills and bill him as the fattest man on earth."

"Huh!" grunted Teddy. "He could crawl through a rat hole in a barn door now. He's thin enough to cut cheese with."

Phil gave his companion a vigorous nudge under the table.

"You'll get into trouble if you are so free in expressing your opinions," he whispered. "Don't forget the advice Mr. Sparling gave you."

"Apple or custard pie?" broke in the voice of the waiter.

"Custard," answered Phil.

"Both for mine," added Teddy.

He got what he had ordered and without the least question, for the Sparling show believed that the best way to make its people contented was to feed them.

Mr. Sparling and his assistants, Phil observed, occupied a table by themselves. After he had finished the owner motioned to him to join them, and there Mrs. Sparling made a place for him by her side and thanked him briefly but warmly for his brave act.

"I shall have to keep an eye on you two boys," she smiled. "Any time I can help you with advice or otherwise you come right to me. Don't you be backward about doing so, will you?"

Phil assured her that he would not.

The two lads after some further conversation strolled from the cook tent.

"I think I'll go in and see how the animals are getting along," decided Phil, beginning to realize that he was free to go where he would and without fear of being ordered off.

Already people were gathering in front of the entrance for the night performance. The doors were advertised to open at seven o'clock, so that the spectators might have plenty of time in which to view the collection of "rare and wonderful beasts, gathered from the remote places of the earth," as the announcer proclaimed from the vantage point of a dry goods box.

Phil bought a bag of peanuts and took them in to his friend Emperor, the beast uttering a shrill cry of joy when he saw Phil approaching.

"I'll try to teach him my whistle," said the boy, puckering his lips and giving the signal that the boys of his school used in summoning each other.

"Think he'll remember that, Mr. Kennedy?" he asked of the trainer.

"Never forget it, will you, Emperor?"

The elephant coughed.

"Never forgets anything. Knows more than any man in the show now, because he has lived longer."

"How old is he?"

"Close to a hundred."

"You don't say?" marveled Teddy. "Hope I'll be able to squeal as loud as that when I'm a hundred. Has he got a hole through his trunk?"

"Not that anybody knows of."

"Come on; I want to see the fellow tame the tiger. I missed that today, because he didn't do it at the afternoon show."

They found Mr. Sparling standing in front of the cage. He, too, was there to watch the performance.

"This looks to me like ready money," he observed to Phil, nodding his head toward the people who were crowding into the tent.

"Mr. Forrest, will you ride Emperor in again tonight? I think that's one of the reasons they have come here," said the showman, shrewdly grasping the least thing that would tend to popularize his show.

"Certainly, sir. I shall enjoy it very much."

They now turned their attention to the cage where the trainer had begun with the savage tiger.

"Bengal is in an ugly temper about something tonight," announced Mr. Sparling in a low tone. "Better be careful, Bob," he cautioned, after having stepped up close to the cage.

"I'll take care of him," answered the trainer, without taking his eyes from the beast for the fraction of a second.

Phil had heard the dialogue and now drew closer to the cage, stepping under the rope and joining Mr. Sparling.

Teddy, of course, not to be left behind, crawled under the rope also.

"Sit down in front," shouted someone. "We can't see the animals play."

In a moment the spectators saw a play that was not down on the bills.

Bob was swinging the whip over Bengal's nose, the cruel lash cutting the tender snout with every blow. But he was not doing it from sheer cruelty, as many of the spectators who raised their voices in loud protest imagined.

Not understanding wild animals as the trainer did, they did not realize that this plucky fellow was fighting for his life, even though he used but a slender rawhide in his effort to do so.

Bengal was crowding him. The least mistake on the trainer's part now and the savage tiger would put a quick and terrible end to him.

"Stand back, everybody! Bring the prods!" bellowed Mr. Sparling.

Phil understood that something was wrong, though he never would have guessed it from the calm expression on the trainer's face.

Not a word did the performer speak, but his hand rained blows on the nose, while snarl after snarl was spit from between Bengal's gleaming teeth.

The trainer was edging slowly toward the door. He knew that nothing could be done with the beast in its present state of terrible temper.

His only hope was that at a favorable moment, when the attendants came with their long, iron bars, he might be able to spring from the door at his back, which he was trying to reach.

Phil's mind was working like an automatic machine. He saw now what the trainer was attempting to do, and was seeking for some means of helping the man. But what could a slender boy hope to do against the power of a great, savage brute like Bengal?

Phil concluded there was nothing.

A pistol flashed almost in the face of the two lads. Mr. Sparling had started away on a run to fetch the attendants who either had not heard or failed to heed his call.

"What did he do that f-f-for?" stammered Teddy.

"To drive the tiger back. It was a blank cartridge that he fired. I think the tiger is going to attack him. Yes, there he goes! Oh, that's _terrible!_"

The trainer had been forced against the bars at the back of the cage by the animal, whose length was more than the width of the

cage itself.

In an unsuspected moment the beast had sprung upon the unfortunate man, and with one sweep of his powerful paw had laid the man low.

With a growl of savage joy, the brute settled back against the bars of the cage near which the lads were standing.

Women shrieked and men grew pale as they stood helpless to do aught to avert the impending tragedy.

Teddy slipped out from under the rope, his face ashen gray. But Phil stood his ground. He felt that he must do something.

Then his opportunity came. The beast's great silken tail popped out through the bars against which he was backing.

Phil Forrest, without an instant's thought of the danger into which he was placing himself, sprang forward.

His hands closed over the tail, which he twisted about his right arm in a flash, at the same time throwing up his feet and bracing them against a wheel of the wagon.

No sooner had he done so than Bengal, uttering a frightful roar, whirled. The force of the jerk as the brute turned hurled Phil Forrest against the bars of the cage with a crash, and Bengal's sharp-clawed feet made a vicious sweep for the body of the lad pressed so tightly against the bars.

CHAPTER XII

A THRILLING RESCUE

"Open the door and let the man out!" shouted Phil, with great presence of mind. But no one seemed to have the power to move.

One sweep of the powerful claw and one side of the lad's clothes was literally stripped from him, though he had managed to shrink back just far enough to save himself from the needle like claws of the tiger.

At this moment men came rushing from other parts of the tent. Some bore iron rods, while two or three carried tent poles and sticks—anything that the circus men could lay their hands upon.

Mr. Sparling was in the lead of the procession that dashed through the crowd, hurling the people right and left as they ran.

With every spring of the tiger Phil was being thrown against the bars with terrific force, but still he clung to the tail that was wrapped about his arm, hanging on with desperate courage.

Though the lad was getting severe punishment, he was accomplishing just what he had hoped for—to keep Bengal busy until help arrived to liberate the unconscious trainer, who lay huddled against the bars on the opposite side of the cage.

”Poke one of the tent poles in to him and let him bite it!” roared Mr. Sparling. ”Half a dozen of you get around behind the cage and when we have his attention one of you pull Bob out. Keep your poles in the opening when you open the door, so Bengal doesn’t jump out. Everybody stand back!”

The commands of the showman came out like so many explosions of a pistol. But it had its effect. His men sprang to their work like machines.

In the meantime Mr. Sparling himself had grabbed the tail of the beast, taking a hold higher up than Phil’s.

”Pull the boy off. He’s hanging on like a bull dog. If you had half his sense you’d have put a stop to this mix-up minutes ago.”

Teddy by this time had gotten in under the ropes again, and, grasping his companion about the waist, he held on until he had untwisted the tiger’s tail from his companion’s arm and released Phil, staggering back with his burden against the rope.

Phil’s limp body, the moment Teddy let go of him, collapsed in a heap.

The circus men were too busy at the moment to notice him. One of the men had thrust a short tent pole between the bars. Bengal was upon it like an avalanche.

Biting, clawing, uttering fierce growls, he tore the hard wood into shreds, the man at the other end poking at the beast with all his might.

Cautiously the rear door of the cage was opened. Two men grasped Bob by the shoulders and hauled him out with a quick pull.

The crowd shouted in approval.

"All out! Let go!" shouted Mr. Sparling.

It took the strength of two men to pull the tent pole from Bengal's grip. The instant he lost the pole the beast whirled and pounced upon the spot where he had left his victim.

Finding that he had lost his prey, the savage beast uttered roar upon roar, that made every spectator in the tent tremble and draw back, fearing the animal would break through the bars and attack them.

"Where's that boy?"

"Here he is, and I guess he's hurt," answered Teddy.

"Give him to me. I'll get him outside where we can get some decent air into him. Is he much hurt?"

"I-I don't know."

The showman grabbed Phil, and as a helper lifted the bottom of the tent's side wall, Mr. Sparling ran to his own small tent with the unconscious Phil.

"Fetch a pail of water."

Teddy ran for the cook tent to get the water. He was amazed to find no cook tent there. Instead, there remained only the open plot of grass, trampled down, with a litter of papers and refuse scattered about.

By the time he had dashed back to the tent to inquire where he could find a pail, one of the showmen had brought some water and Mr. Sparling was bathing Phil's face with it.

He had made a hasty examination of the unconscious boy's wounds, which he did not believe were serious.

Phil soon came to, and by that time the show's doctor had arrived, having been in attendance on the wounded animal trainer.

"No; he'll be sore for a few days, but there's nothing dangerous about those scratches, I should say. I'll dress the wounds and he can go on about his business," was the surgeon's verdict.

"I've got to ride Emperor in tonight," objected Phil.

"You'll do nothing of the sort. You'll get into my wagon and go to bed. That's what you will do, and right quick, at that."

"But," urged the lad, "the people will all think I am seriously hurt if they see no more of me. Don't you think it would be a good plan for me to show myself? They are liable to be uneasy all through the performance. If I show myself they will settle down and forget all about it in a few minutes."

Mr. Sparling turned to his assistant with a significant nod.

"I told you that boy was a natural born showman. You can't stop that kind with a club. Can you stand up alone?"

"Yes."

Phil scrambled to his feet, steadying himself with a hand on the table.

"I'll be all right after I walk about a bit. How long before the elephants go in?"

"You've got fifteen minutes yet."

"Then I may go on?"

"Yes, yes, go on. You'll never be satisfied if you don't. But I ought to take you over my knee and give you a sound walloping."

"Thank you. How is Mr.—Mr.—the trainer?"

"He isn't badly hurt, thanks to your presence of mind, young man," answered the surgeon.

"That makes two people you've saved today, Forrest," emphasized Mr. Sparling. "We will call that a day's work. You have earned your meal ticket. Better run back to the dressing tent and ask them to fix up some clothes for you. Ask for Mrs. Waite, the wardrobe woman. Teddy Tucker, you run in and tell Mr. Kennedy, who has charge of the elephants, that Phil will ride tonight, and to wait until he gets in."

Both boys hurried away on their respective missions. All that Mrs. Waite had that would come anywhere near fitting Phil was a yellow robe that looked like a night gown. Phil grinned as he tucked it under his arm and hurried back to the menagerie tent. As he passed through the "big top" he saw that it was filling up rapidly.

"I guess we are going to have a good house tonight," muttered the lad with a pleased smile. It did not occur to him that he himself was responsible for a large part of the attendance—that the part he had played in the exciting incidents of the day had

done more to advertise the Great Sparling Combined Shows than any other one factor.

"I am all ready, Mr. Kennedy," announced Phil, running to the elephant quarters. The horns were blowing the signal for the grand entry, so the lad grasped the head harness, as Emperor stooped, and was quickly hoisted to the position in which he would enter the ring.

When the people saw that it was indeed Phil they set up a great shout. The lad was pale but resolute. As he went through the performance, his wounds smarted frightfully. At times the pain made him dizzy.

But Phil smiled bravely, waving his hands to the cheering people.

After the finish of the act Mr. Kennedy headed the elephants into the concourse, the open space between the rings and the seats, making a complete circuit of the tent, so that all might see Phil Forrest.

"This is a kind of farewell appearance, you know," grinned Kennedy. And so the audience took it.

The lad's former companions shouted all manner of things to him.

"Good-bye, Phil!"

"Don't stick your head in the lion's mouth."

"Be careful when you twist the tiger's tail. Better put some salt on it before you do."

"We'll look out for Uncle Abner."

Phil was grinning broadly as he rode back into the menagerie tent. Everybody in town now knew that he had joined the circus, which brought forth a variety of comments. Some said it would be the end of the boy, but Phil Forrest knew that a boy could behave himself with a circus just as well as in any other occupation, and so far as his observations went, the circus people were much better than some folks he knew at home.

No sooner had they gotten into the menagerie tent than a sudden bustle and excitement were apparent. Confused shouts were heard on all sides. Teams, fully harnessed, were being led into the tent, quarter-poles were coming down without regard to where they struck, everybody appearing to have gone suddenly crazy.

"They're striking the tent," nodded Mr. Kennedy, noting the boy's wonderment. "You had better look out for yourself. Don't stand in the way or you may get hurt," he warned.

"Get the bulls out!" called a man, hurrying by.

"They're getting," answered Kennedy.

"What do they mean by that?"

"In circus parlance, the 'bulls' are the elephants. Where you going to ride tonight?"

"I don't know. Hello, there's my friend Teddy. I guess I had better attach myself to him or he may get lost."

As a matter of fact, Phil was not sure where he was himself, activities were following each other with such surprising rapidity.

But the lads stuck to their ground until it was no longer safe to do so. Phil was determined to see all there was to be seen, and what he saw he remembered. He had no need to be told after that, providing he understood the meaning of a certain thing at first.

Observing that one man was holding to the peak rope, and that it was rapidly getting the best of him, both lads sprang to his assistance.

"That's right, boys. That's the way to do it. Always be ready to take advantage of every opening. You'll learn faster that way, and you'll both be full-fledged showmen before you know it."

"O Mr. Sparling," exclaimed Phil, after others had relieved them on the rope.

"Yes? What is it?"

"I have been wanting to see you, to ask what you wish us to do tonight—where we are to travel?"

"You may sleep in my wagon. I'll take a horse for tonight."

"I could not think of doing such a thing. No, Mr. Sparling, if I am to be a circus man, I want to do just as the rest of them do. Where do the other performers sleep?"

"Wherever they can find places. Some few of the higher paid ones have berths in wagons. Others sleep in the band wagon. The rest, I guess, don't sleep at all, except after we get into a

town. The menagerie outfit will be leaving town very soon now. You may go through with them if you wish."

"If you do not object, I think I should prefer to remain until the rest of the show goes out."

"Suit yourself."

Mr. Sparling understood how the lads felt, and perhaps it would be better to let them break in at once, he reasoned. They would become seasoned much sooner.

The tent was taken down and packed away in the wagons in an almost incredibly short time.

"Come on; let's go into the circus tent and see what's going on there," suggested Teddy.

Phil agreed, and the lads strolled in. They found the performance nearly over. When it was finished quite a large number remained to see the "grand concert" that followed.

While this was going on there was a crash and a clatter as the men ripped up and loaded the seats, piling them into waiting wagons that had been driven into the tent from the rear so as not to be in the way of the people going out.

"It's more fun to watch the men work than it is to see the concert. That concert's a bum show," averred Teddy, thrusting his hands in his pockets and turning his back on the "grand concert."

"I agree with you," laughed Phil. "There's nothing but the freaks there, and we'll see them, after this, every time we go for our meals."

"Have you been in the dressing tent yet?" asked Teddy.

"No, I haven't had time. We'll have to look in there tomorrow, though I don't think they care about having people visit them unless they belong there. Just now we don't. Do you start work in the cook tent tomorrow?"

"Yes. I am to be the champion coffee drawer. I expect they will have my picture on the billboards after a little. Wouldn't I look funny with a pitcher of hot, steaming coffee in my hand leaping over a table in the cook tent?" and Teddy laughed heartily at the thought. "I'll bet I'd make a hit."

"You mean you would get hit."

"Well, maybe."

The boys hung about until the big top had disappeared from the lot. The tent poles and boxes of properties were being loaded on the wagons, while out on the field, the ring horses, performing ponies and the like stood sleeping, waiting for the moment when they should be aroused for the start.

"Come on, Teddy; let's you and I go make up our beds."

"Where are they?"

"We'll have to ask the porter," laughed Phil, who had traveled a little with his parents years before.

"It's a shame that that old tiger has to have a cage all to himself. We could make up a fine bed if we had half of his cage and some blankets," complained Teddy.

"Thank you. I should prefer to walk. I have had all the argument I want with that beast. Let's go try the band wagon."

"All right; that would be fine to sleep way up there."

Laughing and chattering, the lads hunted about on the lot until they found the great glittering band wagon. Being now covered with canvas to protect it from the weather, they had difficulty in making it out, but finally they discovered it, off near the road that ran by the grounds. Four horses were hitched to it, while the driver lay asleep on the high seat.

"Where will we get in?"

"I don't know, Teddy; we will climb up and find out."

Getting on the rear wheel they pulled themselves up, and finding the canvas covering loose, threw it open. Teddy plumped in feet first.

Immediately there followed such a howling, such a snarling and torrent of invective that, startled as he was, Phil lost his balance on the wheel and fell off.

No sooner had he struck the ground than a dark figure came shooting from above, landing on him and nearly knocking all the breath out of his body.

Phil threw off the burden, which upon investigation proved to be Teddy Tucker.

"Wha-what happened?" stammered Phil. "Sounds as if we had gotten into a wild animal cage."

"I-I walked on somebody's face and he threw me out," answered Teddy ruefully. Phil leaned against the wagon wheel and laughed until his throat ached.

"Get out of here! What do you mean?" bellowed an angry voice over their heads. "Think my face is a tight rope to be walked on by every Rube that comes along?"

"Come-come on away, Teddy. We made a mistake. We got into the wrong berth."

"Here's another wagon, Phil. They're just hitching the horses. Let's try this."

"All right, it's a canvas wagon. Go ahead, we'll try it."

"I've tried one wagon. It's your turn now," growled Teddy.

"I guess you're right. If I get thrown out you catch me the same as I did you," laughed Phil.

"Yes, you caught me, didn't you?"

Phil climbed up, but with more caution than Teddy had exercised in the case of the band wagon.

"Anybody living in this bedroom tonight?" questioned Phil of the driver.

"Guess you are. First come first served. Pile in. You're the kid that rode the bull, ain't you?"

"And twisted the tiger's tail," added Teddy.

"All right. Probably some others will be along later, but I'll see to it that they don't throw you out."

"Thank you. Come on up, Teddy; it's all right."

Teddy Tucker hastily scrambled up into the wagon which proved to be a canvas wagon—an open wagon, over which a canvas cover was stretched in case of storm only.

"Where's the bed clothes?" demanded Teddy.

"I guess the skies will have to be our quilts tonight," answered Phil.

The boys succeeded in crawling down between the folds of the canvas, however, and, snuggling close together, settled down for their first night on the road with a circus. Soon the wagons began to move in response to a chorus of hoarse shouts. The motion of the canvas wagon very soon lulled the lads to sleep, as the big wagon show slowly started away and disappeared in the soft summer night.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DAWNING OF A NEW DAY

"Hi! Stop the train! Stop the train!" howled Teddy, as he landed flat on his back on the hard ground.

"Here, here! What are you fellows doing?" shouted Phil, scrambling to his feet.

"I dreamed I was in a train of cars and they ran off the track," said Teddy, struggling to his feet and rubbing his shins gingerly. "Did you do that?"

"You bet. Think I can wait for you kids to take your beauty sleep? Don't you suppose this show's got something else to do besides furnish sleeping accommodations for lazy kids? Take hold here, and help us get this canvas out if you want any breakfast."

"Take it out yourself," growled Teddy, dodging the flat of the canvasman's hand.

The lads had been hurled from their sleeping place by a rough tentman in a hurry to get at his work. The chill of the early dawn was in the air. The boys stood, with shoulders hunched forward, shivering, their teeth chattering, not knowing where they were and caring still less. They knew only that they were most uncomfortable. The glamor was gone. They were face to face with the hardships of the calling they had chosen, though they did not know that it was only a beginning of those hardships.

"B-r-r-r!" shivered Teddy.

"T-h-h-h-at's what I say," chattered Phil.

"Say, are you kids going to get busy, or do you want me to help you to?"

Phil did not object to work, but he did not like the way the canvasman spoke to them.

"I guess you'll have to do your own work. Come on, Teddy; let's take a run and warm ourselves up."

Hand in hand the lads started off across the field. The field was so dark that they could scarcely distinguish objects about them. Here and there they dodged wagons and teams that stood like silent sentinels in the uncertain light.

"Turn a little, Teddy. We'll be lost before we know it, if we don't watch out—"

"Ouch! We're lost already!"

The ground seemed suddenly to give way beneath them. Both lads were precipitated into a stream of water that stretched across one end of the circus lot.

Shouting and struggling about they finally floundered to the bank, drenched from head to foot. If they had been shivering before, they were suffering from violent attacks of ague now.

"Whew! I'm freezing to death!" cried Phil.

"I feel like the North Pole on Christmas morning," added Teddy. "I wish I was home, so I could thaw out behind the kitchen stove."

"Brace up, Teddy. This is only the beginning of the fun. We shall have worse experiences than this, late in the fall, when the weather gets cool; that is, if they do not get enough of us in the meantime and send us away."

"I—I wish they would send us home now."

"Come now; we've got to run again. We shall surely take our death of cold, if we stand here much longer."

"Run? No, thank you. I've had one run."

"And you don't want another? Is that it?"

"Not I."

"Don't know as I blame you. Well, if you don't want to run, just stand in one place and jump up and down. Whip your hands, and you'll see how soon it will start your blood to circulating."

advised Phil, who immediately proceeded to put his own theory into execution. "That feel better?"

"Yes, some," replied Teddy, rather doubtfully. "But I could be warmer. I wonder what time the cook tent will be up."

"That's an idea. Suppose we go over and find out?"

"Yes, but where is it?"

"I don't know. But we won't find it if we stand here."

They started off again, this time exercising more caution as to where their feet touched. They had not gone far before they came upon some men who were driving small stakes in the ground, marking out the spot where one of the tents was to be pitched.

"Can you tell us where the cook tent is going up?" asked Phil politely.

"North side of the field," grunted the man, not very good-naturedly.

"Which way is north?"

"Get a compass, get a compass," was the discourteous answer.

"He's a grouch. Come along," urged Teddy Tucker.

A few moments later, attracted by a light that looked like a fire, the lads hurried toward it.

"Where will we find the cook tent?" questioned Phil again.

"Right here," was the surprising answer.

"What time will it be ready?"

"About seven o'clock. What's the matter, hungry?"

"More cold than hungry," replied Phil, his teeth chattering.

"Got to get used to that. Come here. I've got something that will doctor you up in no time," announced the man in a cheerful voice, so different from the answers the lads had received to their questions that morning, that they were suddenly imbued with new courage.

"What is it?" asked Phil.

"Coffee, my lad. We always make coffee the first thing when we get in, these chilly mornings. The men work much better after getting something warm inside them. Got a cup?"

They had not.

"Wait, I'll get you one," said the accommodating showman.

Never had anything tasted so good as did the coffee that morning. It was excellent coffee, too, and the boys drank two cups apiece.

"We mustn't drink any more," warned Phil.

"Why not?" wondered Teddy.

"Because we shall be so nervous that we shall not be able to work today. And, by the way, were I in your place, I should get busy here and help in the cook tent until you are told to do something else. I think it will make a good impression on Mr. Sparling."

Teddy consented rather grudgingly.

"I'll turn in and do something at the same time. What can we do to help you, sir? That coffee was very good."

"Might get busy and unpack some dishes from those barrels. Be careful that you don't break any of them."

"All right. Where shall we put them?"

"Pile them on the ground, all the dishes of the same size together. Be sure to set a lantern by them so nobody falls over them in the dark."

The boys, glad of some task to perform, began their work with a will. With something to do it was surprising how quickly they forgot their misfortunes. In a short time they were laughing and joking with the good-natured cooktent man and making the dishes fairly fly out of the barrels.

"Guess I'll have to keep you two boys with my outfit," grinned the showman.

"I think Mr. Sparling said my friend, Teddy here, was to work in the cook tent for the present."

"All right, Mr. Teddy. There's one thing about working in the cook tent that ought to please you."

"What's that?"

"You can piece between meals all you want to. If you are like most boys, you ought to have a good healthy appetite all the time, except when you are sleeping."

"That's right. I could eat an elephant steak now—right this minute. How long before breakfast?"

"Seven o'clock, I told you."

"What time does Mr. Sparling get up?" inquired Phil.

"Up? Ask me what time he goes to bed. I can answer one question as well as the other. Nobody knows. He's always around when you least expect him. There he is now."

The owner was striding toward the cook tent for his morning cup of coffee.

"Good morning, sir," greeted the boys, pausing in their work long enough to touch their hats, after which they continued unpacking the dishes.

"Morning, boys. I see you are up early and getting right at it. That's right. No showman was ever made out of a sleepy-head. Where did you sleep last night?"

"In a wagon on a pile of canvas," answered Phil.

"And they threw us out of bed this morning," Teddy informed him, with a grimace.

Mr. Sparling laughed heartily.

"And we fell in a creek," added Teddy.

"Well, well, you certainly are having your share of experiences."

"Will you allow me to make a suggestion, Mr. Sparling?" asked Phil.

"Of course. You need not ask that question. What is it?"

"I think I ought to have some sort of a costume if I am to continue to ride Emperor in the grand entry."

"H-m-m-m. What kind do you think you want?"

"Could I wear tights?"

Mr. Sparling was about to laugh, but one glance into the earnest eyes of Phil Forrest told him that the boy's interest was wholly in wishing to improve the act—not for the sake of showing himself, alone.

"Yes, I think perhaps it might not be a bad idea. You go tell Mrs. Waite to fix you up with a suit. But I would prefer to have you wear your own clothes today."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"I'll tell you why. I telegraphed on to my advance man all about you last night, and what you did yesterday will be spread all over town here today. It will be a rattling good advertisement. You and the tiger are my best drawing cards today," smiled Mr. Sparling.

"Glad I have proved of some use to you, sir."

"Use? Use?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't be a fool!" exploded the showman, almost brutally.

Phil's countenance fell.

"Don't you understand, yet, that you already have been worth several thousand dollars to me?"

"I-I—"

"Well, don't get a swelled head about it, for—"

"There is no danger of that, sir."

"And you don't have to potter around the cook tent working, either. That is, not unless you want to."

"But, I do, Mr. Sparling. I want to learn everything there is to be learned about the show business," protested Phil.

Mr. Sparling regarded him quizzically.

"You'll do," he said, turning away.

As soon as the dressing tent had been erected and the baggage was moved in, Phil hurried to the entrance of the women's dressing

tent and calling for Mrs. Waite, told her what was wanted.

She measured his figure with her eyes, and nodded understandingly.

"Think I've got something that will fit you. A young fellow who worked on the trapeze fell off and broke a leg. He was just about your size, and I guess his tights will be about right for you. Not superstitious, are you?"

Phil assured her he was not.

"You will be, after you have been in the show business a while. Wait, I'll get them."

Phil's eyes glowed as he saw her returning with a suit of bright red tights, trunk and shirt to match.

"Oh, thank you ever so much."

"You're welcome. Have you a trunk to keep your stuff in?"

"No; I have only a bag."

"I've got a trunk in here that's not in use. If you want to drag it over to the men's dressing tent you're welcome to it."

Phil soon had the trunk, which he hauled across the open paddock to the place where the men were settling their belongings. He espied Mr. Miaco, the head clown.

"Does it make any difference where I place my trunk, Mr. Miaco?"

"It does, my lad. The performers' trunks occupy exactly the same position every day during the show year. I'll pick out a place for you, and every morning when you come in you will find your baggage there. Let me see. I guess we'll place you up at the end, next to the side wall of the dressing room. You will be more by yourself there. You'll like that, won't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Going in in costume, today?"

"No, sir. Mr. Sparling thought I had better wear my own clothes today, for advertising purposes."

Miaco nodded understandingly.

"Then you'll want to fix up again. Been in the gutter?"

"I fell into a ditch in the darkness this morning," grinned Phil.

"You'll get used to that. Mr. Ducro, the ringmaster, carries a lantern with him so he won't fall in, but none of the rest of us do. We call him Old Diogenes because he always has a lantern in his hand. If you'll take off that suit I'll put it in shape for you."

"Undress—here?"

"Sure. You'll have to get used to that."

Phil retired to the further end of the tent where his trunk had been placed in the meantime, and there took off his clothes, handing them to the head clown. Mr. Miaco tossed the lad a bath robe, for the morning was still chilly.

"After you get broken in you will have to do all this for yourself. There's nothing like the show business to teach a fellow to depend upon himself. He soon becomes a jack-of-all-trades. As soon as you can you'll want to get yourself a rubber coat and a pair of rubber boots. We'll get some beastly weather by-and-by."

The good-natured clown ran on with much good advice while he was sponging and pressing Phil's clothes. When he had finished, the suit looked as if it had just come from a tailor shop.

Phil thanked him warmly.

"Now, you and I will see about some breakfast."

Reaching the cook tent, the first person Phil set eyes on was his chum, Teddy Tucker. Teddy was presiding over the big nickel coffeepot, his face flushed with importance. He was bossing the grinning waiters, none of whom found it in his heart to get impatient with the new boy.

CHAPTER XIV

AN UNEXPECTED HIT

"Another turn-away," decided a ticket taker, casting his eyes over the crowds that had gathered for the afternoon performance.

"I guess Mr. Sparling knows his business pretty well," mused Phil. "He knows how to catch the crowd. I wonder how many of them have come here to see me. How they would look and stare if they knew I was the kid that twisted the tiger's tail."

Phil's color rose.

It was something for a boy who had been a circus performer for less than two days to have his name heralded ahead of the show as one of the leading attractions.

But Phil Forrest had a level head. He did not delude himself with any extravagant idea of his own importance. He knew that what he had done was purely the result of accident.

"I'll do something, someday, that will be worthwhile," he told himself.

Phil's act that afternoon was fully as successful as it had been on the previous day back in his home town. Besides, he now had more confidence in himself. He felt that in a very short time he might be able to keep his feet on the elephant's head without the support of Emperor's trunk. That would be an achievement.

On this particular afternoon he rode with as much confidence as if he had been doing it all the season.

"You'll make a performer," encouraged Kennedy. "You've got the poise and everything necessary to make you a good one."

"What kind, do you think?"

"Any old kind. Do you get dizzy when up in the air?"

"I don't remember that I have ever been up much further than Emperor hoists me," laughed Phil.

For the next two minutes the man and the boy were too busy with their act to continue their conversation. The audience was enthusiastic, and they shouted out Phil Forrest's name several times, which made him smile happily.

"What would you advise me to do, Mr. Kennedy?" he asked as the elephants started to leave the ring, amid the plaudits of the spectators.

"Ever try the rings?"

"Yes, but not so high up as those that Rod and his partners perform on."

"Height doesn't make much difference. Get them to let the rings down so you can reach them, then each day raise them a little higher, if you find you can work on them."

"Thank you. Perhaps I'll try it this afternoon. I am anxious to be a real performer. Anybody could do this. Though it's easy, I think I might work up this act of ours to make it rather funny."

It will be observed that Phil was rapidly falling into the vernacular of the showman.

"If you've got any ideas we'll thresh them out. Emperor will be willing. He'll say yes to anything you suggest. What is it?"

"Don't you think Mr. Sparling would object?"

"Not he. Wait till I get the bulls chained; then we'll talk."

After attending to his charges, Mr. Kennedy and Phil stepped behind the elephants and sat down on a pile of straw against the side walls of the menagerie tent.

Phil confided at length what he had in mind, Kennedy nodding from time to time as Phil made points that met with the trainer's approval.

"Boy, you've got a head on you a yard wide. You'll make your everlasting fortune. Why, I'd never even thought of that before."

"Don't you think I had better speak to Mr. Sparling?"

Kennedy reflected for a moment.

"Perhaps you had better do so. But you needn't tell him what it is. We'll give them a surprise. Let's go see the property man and the carpenter. We'll find out what they can do for us."

Slipping out under the canvas, the two hurried back to the property room, an enclosure where all the costumes were kept, together with the armor used in the grand entry, and the other trappings employed in the show, known as properties.

Mr. Kennedy explained to the property man what was wanted. The latter called in the carpenter. After consulting for a few minutes, they decided that they could give the elephant trainer

and his assistant what they sought.

"When will you have it ready?"

"Maybe in time for tonight's performance, but I can't promise for sure."

"Thank you," exclaimed Phil, hurrying away to consult with Mr. Sparling.

"I have been thinking out a plan to work up my part of the elephant act," announced Phil, much to the owner's surprise.

"You have, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"I was in hopes you wouldn't ask me that. I wanted to surprise you."

Mr. Sparling shook his head doubtfully.

"I'm afraid you haven't had experience enough to warrant my trusting so important a matter to you," answered the showman, knowing how serious a bungled act might be, and how it would be likely to weaken the whole show.

Phil's face showed his disappointment.

"Mr. Kennedy says it will be a fine act. I have seen the property man and the carpenter, and they both think it's great. They are getting my properties ready now."

"So, so?" wondered the owner, raising his eyebrows ever so little. "You seem to be making progress, young man. Let's see, how long have you been in the show business?" he reflected.

"Twenty-four hours," answered Phil promptly.

Mr. Sparling grinned.

"M-m-m-m. You're certainly getting on fast. Who told you you might give orders to my property man and my carpenter, sir?" the proprietor demanded, somewhat sternly.

"I took that upon myself, sir. I'm sure it would improve the act, even though I have not had as much experience as I might

have. Will you let me try it?" demanded the boy boldly.

"I'll think about it. Yes, I'll think about it. H-m-m-m!
H-m-m-m!"

Thus encouraged, Phil left his employer, going in to watch some of the other acts.

About that time Mr. Sparling found it convenient to make a trip back to the property man's room, where he had quite a long talk with that functionary. The proprietor came away smiling and nodding.

About an hour later Phil sauntered out and passed in front of Mr. Sparling's tent, hoping the showman would see him and call him in.

Phil was not disappointed. Mr. Sparling did that very thing.

"How's that new act of yours coming along, young man?" he demanded.

"I have done no more than think it over since talking with you a little while ago. If the props are ready Mr. Kennedy and I will have a quiet rehearsal this afternoon. That is, if we can shoo everybody out of the tent and you are willing we should try it. How about it, sir?"

"I must say you are a most persistent young man."

"Yes, sir."

"And what if this act falls down flat? What then?"

"It mustn't."

"But if it does?"

"Then, sir, I'll give up the show business and go back to Edmeston, where I'll hire out to work on a farm. If I can't do a little thing like this I guess the farm will be the best place for me."

Phil was solemn and he meant every word he said. Mr. Sparling, however, unable to maintain his serious expression, laughed heartily.

"My boy, you are all right. Go ahead and work up your act. You have my full permission to do that in your own way, acting, of course, under the approval of Mr. Kennedy. He knows what would

go with his bulls.”

”Thank you, thank you very much,” exclaimed Phil, impulsively. ”I hope you will be pleasantly surprised.”

”I expect to be.”

Phil ran as fast as his legs would carry him to convey the good news to Mr. Kennedy. Active preparations followed, together with several hurried trips to the property room. The property man was getting along famously with his part of the plan, and both Phil and Mr. Kennedy approved of what had been done thus far.

According to programme, after the afternoon show had been finished and all the performers had gone to the cook tent the rehearsal took place in the menagerie tent. Faithful to his promise, Mr. Sparling kept away, but a pair of eyes representing him was peering through a pin-hole in the canvas stretched across the main opening where the ticket takers stood when at work.

”That’s great, kid! Great, you bet!” shouted Mr. Kennedy after a successful trial of their new apparatus.

With light heart, an expansive grin overspreading his countenance, the lad ran to the cook tent for his supper. He came near missing it as it was, for the cook was about to close the tent. Mr. Sparling, who was standing near the exit, nodded to the chief steward to give Phil and Mr. Kennedy their suppers.

”Well, did the rehearsal fall down?” he asked, with a quizzical smile on his face.

”It fell down, but not in the way you think,” laughed Phil happily.

No further questions were asked of him.

That night, when the grand entry opened the show to a packed house, a shout of laughter from the great assemblage greeted the entrance of old Emperor. Emperor was clad in a calico gown of ancient style, with a market basket tucked in the curl of his trunk. But the most humorous part of the long-suffering elephant’s makeup was his head gear.

There, perched jauntily to one side was the most wonderful bonnet that any of the vast audience ever had gazed upon. It was tied with bright red ribbons under Emperor’s chops with a collection of vari-colored, bobbing roses protruding from its top. Altogether it was a very wonderful piece of head gear.

The further the act proceeded the more the humor of Emperor's makeup appeared to impress the audience. They laughed and laughed until the tears ran down their cheeks, while the elephant himself, appearing to share in the humor of the hour, never before had indulged in so many funny antics.

Mr. Kennedy, familiar with side-splitting exhibitions, forgot himself so far as actually to laugh out loud.

But where was Phil Forrest? Thus far everybody had been too much interested in the old lady with the trunk and the market basket to give a thought to the missing boy, though some of the performers found themselves wondering if he had closed with the show already.

Those of the performers not otherwise engaged at the moment were assembled inside the big top at one side of the bandstand, fairly holding their sides with laughter over old Emperor's exhibition.

Standing back in the shadow of the seats, where the rays from the gasoline lamps did not reach, stood Mr. Sparling, a pleased smile on his face, his eyes twinkling with merriment. It was a good act that could draw from James Sparling these signs of approval.

The act was nearing its close.

The audience thought they had seen the best of it. But there was still a surprise to come—a surprise that they did not even dream of.

The time was at hand for the elephants to rear in a grand finale. An attendant quietly led Jupiter from the ring and to his quarters, Emperor making a circuit of the sawdust arena to cover the going of the other elephant and that there might be no cessation of action in the exhibition.

Emperor and his trainer finally halted, standing facing the reserved seats, as motionless as statues.

The audience sat silent and expectant. They felt that something still was before them, but what they had not the least idea, of course.

"Up, Emperor!" commanded Mr. Kennedy in a quiet voice. "All ready, Phil."

The elephant reared slowly on its hind legs, going higher and higher, as it did in its regular performance.

As he went up, the bonnet on Emperor's head was seen to take on sudden life. The old calico gown fell away from the huge beast at the same time, leaving him clothed in a brilliant blanket of white and gold.

But a long drawn "a-h-h-h," rippled over the packed seats as the old elephant's bonnet suddenly collapsed.

Out of the ruins rose a slender, supple figure, topping the pyramid of elephant flesh in a graceful poise. The figure, clad in red silk tights, appeared to be that of a beautiful girl.

The audience broke out into a thunder of approval, their feet drumming on the board seats sounding not unlike the rattle of musketry.

The girl's hand was passed around to the back of her waist, where it lingered for an instant, then both hands were thrown forward just as a diver does before taking the plunge.

"Ready?"

"Yes."

"Fly!"

The young girl floated out and off from the elephant's back, landing gently on her feet just outside the sawdust ring.

Emperor, at this juncture, threw himself forward on his forelegs, stretched out his trunk, encircling the performer's waist and lifting her clear off the ground.

At that moment the supposed young woman stripped her blonde wig from her head, revealing the fact that the supposed girl was no girl at all. It was a boy, and that boy was Phil Forrest.

Emperor, holding his young friend at full length ahead of him, started rapidly for his quarters, Phil lying half on his side, appearing to be floating on the air, save for the black trunk that held him securely in its grip.

At this the audience fairly howled in its surprise and delight, but Phil never varied his pose by a hair's breadth until Emperor finally set him down, flushed and triumphant, in the menagerie tent.

At that moment Phil became conscious of a figure running toward him.

He discovered at once that it was Mr. Sparling.

Grasping both the lad's hands, the showman wrung them until it seemed to Phil as if his arms would be wrenched from their sockets.

"Great, great, great!" cried the owner of the show.

"Did you like it?" questioned the blushing Phil.

"Like it? Like it? Boy, it's the greatest act I ever saw. It's a winner. Come back with me."

"What, into the ring?"

"Yes."

"But what shall I do?"

"You don't have to do anything. You've done it already. Show yourself, that's all. Hurry! Don't you hear them howling like a band of Comanche Indians?"

"Y-yes."

"They want you."

By this time Mr. Sparling was fairly dragging Phil along with him. As they entered the big top the cheering broke out afresh.

Phil was more disturbed than ever before in his life. It seemed as though his legs would collapse under him.

"Buck up! Buck up!" snapped the showman. "You are not going to get an attack of stage fright at this late hour, are you?"

That was exactly what was the matter with Phil Forrest. He was nearly scared out of his wits, but he did not realize the nature of his affliction.

"Bow and kiss your hand to them," admonished the showman.

Phil did so, but his face refused to smile. He couldn't have smiled at that moment to save his life.

All at once he wrenched himself loose from Mr. Sparling's grip, and ran full speed for the dressing tent. He had not gone more than a dozen feet before he tripped over a rope, landing on head and shoulders. But Phil was up like a rubber man and off again

as if every animal in the menagerie was pursuing him.

The spectators catching the meaning of his flight, stood up in their seats and howled lustily.

Phil Forrest had made a hit that comes to few men in the sawdust arena.

CHAPTER XV

A STROKE OF GOOD FORTUNE

"That was a knockout, kid," nodded Mr. Miaco, with emphasis. "I'm laughing on the inside of me yet. I don't dare let my face laugh, for fear the wrinkles will break through my makeup."

"Thank you," smiled Phil, tugging at his silk tights, that fitted so closely as to cause him considerable trouble in stripping them off.

"You'll have the whole show jealous of you if you don't watch out. But don't get a swelled head—"

"Not unless I fall off and bump it," laughed Phil. "Where do I wash?"

"You always want to get a pail of water before you undress."

"Say, Phil, did you really fly?" queried Teddy, who was standing by eyeing his companion admiringly.

"Sure. Didn't you see me?"

"I did and I didn't. Will you show me how to fly like that?"

"'Course I will. You come in under the big top tomorrow after the show and I'll give you a lesson."

Teddy had not happened to observe the simple mechanical arrangement that had permitted the young circus performer to carry out his flying act.

"I reckon you ought to get a dollar a day for that stunt," decided Teddy.

"Yes, I think so myself," grinned Phil.

Teddy now turned his attention to Mr. Miaco, who, made up for his clown act in the ring, presented a most grotesque appearance.

"How do I look?" asked the clown, noting the lad's observant gaze.

"You look as if you'd stuck your head in a flour barrel," grunted Teddy.

"Ho ho," laughed the clown. "I'll have to try that on the audience. That's a good joke. To look at you, one wouldn't think it of you, either."

"Oh, that's nothing. I can say funnier things than that when I want to. Why--"

But their conversation was cut short by the band striking up the tune to which Mr. Miaco always entered the ring.

"Listen to me, kid. You'll hear them laugh when I tell 'em the story," he called back. And they did. The audience roared when the funny man told them what his young friend had said.

His work for the day having been finished, Phil bethought himself of his trunk, which had not yet been packed. His costume was suspended from a line in the dressing tent where many other costumes were hanging to air and dry after the strenuous labors of their owners.

Phil took his slender belongings down, shook them out well and laid them in the trunk that Mrs. Waite had given him. It was too late for Phil to get his bag from the baggage wagon, so with a grin he locked his tights and his wig in the trunk.

"Guess they won't break their backs lifting that outfit," he mused.

Phil then strolled in to watch the show. He found many new points of interest and much that was instructive, as he studied each act attentively and with the keenness of one who had been in the show business all his life.

"Someday I'll have a show like this myself," nodded the boy. He did not know that he expressed his thoughts aloud until he noticed that the people sitting nearest to him were regarding him with amused smiles.

Phil quickly repressed his audible comments.

The show was soon over; then came the noise and the confusion of the breaking up. The illusion was gone—the glamor was a thing of the past. The lad strolled about slowly in search of his companion, whom he eventually found in the dressing tent.

”Teddy, isn’t it about time you and I went to bed?” he asked.

”Oh, I don’t know. Circus people sleep when there isn’t anything else to do. Where we going to sleep?”

”Same place, I presume, if no one gets ahead of us.”

”They’d better not. I’ll throw them out if they do.”

Phil laughed good-naturedly.

”If I remember correctly, somebody was thrown out last night and this morning, but it didn’t happen to be the other fellow. I’m hungry; wish I had something to eat.”

”So am I,” agreed Teddy.

”You boys should get a sandwich or so and keep the stuff in your trunk while we are playing these country towns. When we get into the cities, where they have restaurants, you can get a lunch downtown after you have finished your act and then be back in time to go out with the wagons,” Mr. Miaco informed them. ”You’ll pick up these little tricks as we go along, and it won’t be long before you are full-fledged showmen. You are pretty near that point already.”

The lads strolled out on the lot and began hunting for their wagon. They found nothing that looked like it for sometime and had about concluded that the canvas wagon had gone, when they chanced to come across the driver of the previous night, who directed them to where they would find it.

”The wagon isn’t loaded yet. You’ll have to wait half an hour or so,” he said.

They thanked him and went on in the direction indicated, where they soon found that which they were in search of.

”I think we had better wait here until it is loaded,” advised Phil, throwing himself down on the ground.

”This having to hunt around over a ten-acre lot for your bedroom every night isn’t as much fun as you would think, is it?” grinned

Teddy.

"Might be worse. I have an idea we haven't begun to experience the real hardships of the circus life." And indeed they had not.

Soon after that the wagon was loaded, and, bidding the driver a cheery good night, the circus boys tumbled in and crawled under the canvas.

They were awakened sometime before daylight by a sudden heavy downpour of rain. The boys were soaked to the skin, the water having run in under the canvas until they were lying in a puddle of water.

There was thunder and lightning. Phil scrambled out first and glanced up at the driver, who, clothed in oilskins, was huddled on his seat fast asleep. He did not seem to be aware that there was anything unusual about the weather.

"I wish I was home," growled Teddy.

"Well, I don't. Bad as it is, it's better than some other things that I know of. I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll get rubber coats for us both when we get in in the morning."

"Got the money?"

"That's so. I had forgotten that," laughed Phil. "I never thought that I should need money to buy a coat with. We'll have to wait until payday. I wonder when that is?"

"Ask Mr. Sparling."

"No; I would rather not."

"All right; get wet then."

"I am. I couldn't be any more so were I to jump in the mill pond at home," laughed Phil.

Home! It seemed a long way off to these two friendless, or at least homeless, boys, though the little village of Edmeston was less than thirty miles away.

The show did not get in to the next town until sometime after daylight, owing to the heavy condition of the roads. The cook tent was up when they arrived and the lads lost no time in scrambling from the wagon. They did not have to be thrown out this morning.

"Come on," shouted Phil, making a run for the protection of the cook tent, for the rain was coming down in sheets.

Teddy was not far behind.

"I'm the coffee boy. Where's the coffee?" he shouted.

"Have it in a few minutes," answered the attendant who had been so kind to them the previous morning. "Here, you boys, get over by the steam boiler there and dry out your clothes," he added, noting that their teeth were chattering.

"Wish somebody would pour a pail of water over me," shivered Teddy.

"Water? What for?"

"To wash the rain off. I'm soaked," he answered humorously.

They huddled around the steam boiler, the warmth from which they found very comforting in their bedraggled condition.

"I'm steaming like an engine," laughed Phil, taking off his coat and holding it near the boiler.

"Yes; I've got enough of it in my clothes to run a sawmill," agreed Teddy. "How about that coffee?"

"Here it is."

After helping themselves they felt much better. Phil, after a time, walked to the entrance of the cook tent and looked out. The same bustle and excitement as on the previous two days was noticeable everywhere, and the men worked as if utterly oblivious of the fact that the rain was falling in torrents.

"Do we parade today?" called Phil, observing Mr. Sparling hurrying past wrapped in oilskins and slouch hat.

"This show gives a parade and two performances a day, rain, shine, snow or earthquake," was the emphatic answer. "Come over to my tent in half an hour. I have something to say to you."

Phil ran across to Mr. Sparling's tent at the expiration of half an hour, but he was ahead of time evidently, for the showman was not there. Nice dry straw had been piled on the ground in the little tent to take up the moisture, giving it a cosy, comfortable look inside.

"This wouldn't be a half bad place to sleep," decided Phil, looking about him. "I don't suppose we ever play the same town two nights in succession. I must find out."

Mr. Sparling bustled in at this point, stripping off his wet oilskins and hanging them on a hook on the tent pole at the further end.

"Where'd you sleep?"

"In wagon No. 10."

"Get wet?"

"Very."

"Humph!"

"We dried out in the cook tent when we got in. It might have been worse."

"Easily satisfied, aren't you?"

"I don't know about that. I expect to meet with some disagreeable experiences."

"You won't be disappointed. You'll get all that's coming to you. It'll make a man of you if you stand it."

"And if I don't?" questioned Phil Forrest, with a smile.

Mr. Sparling answered by a shrug of the shoulders.

"We'll have to make some different arrangements for you," he added in a slightly milder tone. "Can't afford to have you get sick and knock your act out. It's too important. I'll fire some lazy, good-for-nothing performer out of a closed wagon and give you his place."

"Oh, I should rather not have you do that, sir."

"Who's running this show?" snapped the owner.

Phil made no reply.

"I am. I'll turn out whom I please and when I please. I've been in the business long enough to know when I've got a good thing. Where's your rubber coat?" he demanded, changing the subject abruptly.

"I have none, sir. I shall get an outfit later."

"No money, I suppose?"

"Well, no, sir."

"Humph! Why didn't you ask for some?"

"I did not like to."

"You're too modest. If you want a thing go after it. That's my motto. Here's ten dollars. Go downtown and get you a coat, and be lively about it. Wait a minute!" as Phil, uttering profuse thanks, started away to obey his employer's command.

"Yes, sir."

"About that act of yours. Did you think it out all yourself?"

"The idea was mine. Of course the property man and Mr. Kennedy worked it out for me. I should not have been able to do it alone."

"Humph! Little they did. They wouldn't have thought of it in a thousand years. Performers usually are too well satisfied with themselves to think there's anything worthwhile except what they've been doing since they came out of knickerbockers. How'd you get the idea?"

"I don't know—it just came to me."

"Then keep on thinking. That act is worth real money to any show. How much did I say I'd pay you?"

"Ten dollars a week, sir."

"Humph! I made a mistake. I won't give you ten."

Phil looked solemn.

"I'll give you twenty. I'd give you more, but it might spoil you. Get out of here and go buy yourself a coat."

CHAPTER XVI

HIS FIRST SETBACK

"Tha-thank--"

"Out with you!"

Laughing, his face flushed with pride and satisfaction, Phil did move. Not even pausing to note what direction he should go, he hurried on toward the village, perhaps more by instinct than otherwise. He was too full of this wonderful thing that had come to him--success--to take note of his surroundings.

To Phil there was no rain. Though he already was drenched to the skin he did not know it.

All at once he pulled himself up sharply.

"Phil Forrest, you are getting excited," he chided. "Now, don't you try to make yourself believe you are the whole show, for you are only a little corner of it. You are not even a side show. You are a lucky boy, but you are going to keep your head level and try to earn your money. Twenty dollars a week! Why, it's wealth! I can see Uncle Abner shaking his stick when he hears of it. I must write to Mrs. Cahill and tell her the good news. She'll be glad, though I'll warrant the boys at home will be jealous when they hear about how I am getting on in the world."

Thus talking to himself, Phil plodded on in the storm until he reached the business part of the town. There he found a store and soon had provided himself with a serviceable rubber coat, a pair of rubber boots and a soft hat. He put on his purchases, doing up his shoes and carrying them back under his arm.

The parade started at noon. It was a dismal affair--that is, so far as the performers were concerned, and the clowns looked much more funny than they felt.

Mr. Miaco enlivened the spirits of those on the hayrack by climbing to the back of one of the horses drawing the clowns' wagon, where he sat with a doll's parasol over his head and a doll in his arms singing a lullaby.

The people who were massed along the sidewalks of the main street did not appear to mind the rain at all. They were too much interested in the free show being given for their benefit.

The show people ate dinner with their feet in the mud that day, the cook tent having been pitched on a barren strip of ground.

"This is where the Armless Wonder has the best of us today," nodded Teddy, with his usual keen eye for humor.

"How is that?" questioned Mr. Miaco.

" 'Cause he don't have to put his feet in the mud like the rest of us do. He keeps them on the table. I wish I could put my feet on the table."

Everybody within hearing laughed heartily.

In the tents there was little to remind one of the dismal weather, save for the roar of the falling rain on the canvas overhead. Straw had been piled all about on the ground inside the two large tents, and only here and there were there any muddy spots, though the odor of fresh wet grass was everywhere.

The afternoon performance went off without a hitch, though the performers were somewhat more slow than usual, owing to the uncertainty of the footing for man and beast. Phil Forrest's exhibition was even more successful than it had been in the last show town. He was obliged to run back to the ring and show himself after having been carried from the tent by Emperor. This time, however, his stage fright had entirely left him, never to return. He was now a seasoned showman, after something less than three days under canvas.

The afternoon show being finished, and supper out of the way, Phil and Teddy returned to the big top to practice on the flying rings, which they had obtained permission to use.

Mr. Miaco, himself an all around acrobat, was on hand to watch their work and to offer suggestions. He had taken a keen interest in Phil Forrest, seeing in the lad the making of a high-class circus performer.

The rings were let down to within about ten feet of the sawdust ring, and one at a time the two lads were hoisted by the clown until their fingers grasped the iron rings.

With several violent movements of their bodies they curled their feet up, slipping them through the rings, first having grasped the ropes above the rings.

"That was well done. Quite professional," nodded the clown. "Take hold of this rope and I will swing you. If it makes you

dizzy, tell me.”

”Don’t worry; it won’t,” laughed Phil.

”Give me a shove, too,” urged Teddy.

”In a minute.”

Mr. Miaco began swinging Phil backwards and forwards, his speed ever increasing, and as he went higher and higher, Phil let himself down, fastening his hands on the rings that he might assist in the swinging.

”Now, see if you can get back in the rings with your legs.”

”That’s easy,” answered Phil, his breath coming sharp and fast, for he never had taken such a long sweep in the rings before.

The feat was not quite so easy as he had imagined. Phil made three attempts before succeeding. But he mastered it and came up smiling.

”Good,” cried the clown, clapping his hands approvingly.

”Give me another swing. I want to try something else.”

Having gained sufficient momentum, the lad, after reaching the point where the rings would start on their backward flight, permitted his legs to slip through the rings, catching them with his feet.

He swept back, head and arms hanging down, as skillfully as if he had been doing that very thing right along.

”You’ll do,” emphasized the clown. ”You will need to put a little more finish in your work. I’ll give you a lesson in that next time.”

Teddy, not to be outdone, went through the same exhibition, though not quite with the same speed that Phil had shown.

It being the hour when the performers always gathered in the big top to practice and play, many of them stood about watching the boys work. They nodded their heads approvingly when Phil finished and swung himself to the ground.

Teddy, on his part, overrated his ability when it came to hanging by his feet.

"Look out!" warned half a dozen performers at once.

He had not turned his left foot into the position where it would catch and hold in the ring. Their trained eyes had noted this omission instantly.

The foot, of course, failed to catch, and Teddy uttered a howl when he found himself falling. His fall, however, was checked by a sharp jolt. The right foot had caught properly. As he swept past the laughing performers he was dangling in the air like a huge spider, both hands and one foot clawing the air in a desperate manner.

There was nothing they could do to liberate him from his uncomfortable position until the momentum of his swing had lessened sufficiently to enable them to catch him.

"Hold your right steady!" cautioned Miaco. "If you twist it you'll take a beauty tumble."

Teddy hadn't thought of that before. Had Miaco known the lad better he would not have made the mistake of giving that advice.

Teddy promptly turned his foot.

He shot from the flying rings as if he had been fired from a cannon.

Phil tried to catch him, but stumbled and fell over a rope, while Teddy shot over his head, landing on and diving head first into a pile of straw that had just been brought in to bed down the tent for the evening performance.

Nothing of Teddy save his feet was visible.

They hauled him out by those selfsame feet, and, after disentangling him from the straws that clung to him, were relieved to find that he had not been hurt in the least.

"I guess we shall have to put a net under you. Lucky for you that that pile of straw happened to get in your way. Do you know what would have happened to you had it not been?" demanded Mr. Miaco.

"I-I guess I'd have made a hit," decided Teddy wisely.

"I guess there is no doubt about that."

The performers roared.

"I'm going to try it again."

"No; you've done enough for one day. You won't be able to hold up the coffeepot tomorrow morning if you do much more."

"Do you think we will be able to accomplish anything on the flying rings, Mr. Miaco?" asked Phil after they had returned to the dressing tent.

"There is no doubt of it. Were I in your place I should take an hour's work on them every day. Besides building you up generally, it will make you surer and better able to handle yourself. Then, again, you never know what minute you may be able to increase your income. People in this business often profit by others' misfortunes," added the clown significantly.

"I would prefer not to profit that way," answered Phil.

"You would rather do it by your own efforts?"

"Yes."

"It all amounts to the same thing. You are liable to be put out any minute yourself, then somebody else will get your job, if you are a performer of importance to the show."

"You mean if my act is?"

"That's what I mean."

The old clown and the enthusiastic young showman talked in the dressing tent until it was time for each to begin making up for the evening performance.

The dressing tent was the real home of the performers. They knew no other. It was there that they unpacked their trunks—there that during their brief stay they pinned up against the canvas walls the pictures of their loved ones, many of whom were far across the sea. A bit of ribbon here, a faded flower drawn from the recess of a trunk full of silk and spangles, told of the tender hearts that were beating beneath those iron-muscled breasts, and that they were as much human beings as their brothers in other walks of life.

Much of this Phil understood in a vague way as he watched them from day to day. He was beginning to like these big-hearted, big-muscled fellows, though there were those among them who were not desirable as friends.

"I guess it's just the same as it is at home," decided Phil.
"Some of the folks are worthwhile, and others are not."

He had summed it up.

Sometime before the evening performance was due to begin Phil was made up and ready for his act. As his exhibition came on at the very beginning he had to be ready early. Then, again, he was obliged to walk all the way to the menagerie tent to reach his elephant.

Throwing a robe over his shoulders and pulling his hat well down over his eyes, the lad pushed the silken curtains aside and began working his way toward the front, beating against the human tide that had set in against him, wet, dripping, but good natured.

"Going to have a wet night," observed Teddy, whom he met at the entrance to the menagerie tent.

"Looks that way. But never mind; I'll share my rubber coat with you. We can put it over us and sit up to sleep. That will make a waterproof tent. Perhaps we may be able to find a stake or something to stick up in the middle of the coat."

"But the canvas under us will be soaked," grumbled Teddy. "We'll be wetter than ever."

"We'll gather some straw and tie it up in a tight bundle to put under us when we get located. There goes the band. I must be off, or you'll hear Emperor screaming for me."

"He's at it now. Hear him?"

"I couldn't well help hearing that roar," laughed Phil, starting off on a run.

The grand entry was made, Phil crouching low in the bonnet on the big beast's head. It was an uncomfortable position, but he did not mind it in the least. The only thing that troubled Phil was the fear that the head gear might become disarranged and spoil the effect of his surprise. There were many in the tent who had seen him make his flight at the afternoon performance, and had returned with their friends almost solely to witness the pretty spectacle again.

The time had arrived for Emperor to rise for his grand salute to the audience. Mr. Kennedy had given Phil his cue, the lad had braced himself to straighten up suddenly. A strap had been attached to the elephant's head harness for Phil to take hold of to steady himself by when he first straightened up. Until his

position was erect Emperor could not grasp the boy's legs with his trunk.

"Right!" came the trainer's command.

The circus boy thrust out his elbows, and the bonnet fell away, as he rose smiling to face the sea of white, expectant faces before him.

While they were applauding he fastened the flying wire to the ring in his belt. The wire, which was suspended from above, was so small that it was wholly invisible to the spectators, which heightened the effect of his flight. So absorbed were the people in watching the slender figure each time that they failed to observe an attendant hauling on a rope near the center pole, which was the secret of Phil's ability to fly.

Throwing his hands out before him the little performer dove gracefully out into the air.

There was a slight jolt. Instantly he knew that something was wrong. The audience, too, instinctively felt that the act was not ending as it should.

Phil was falling. He was plunging straight toward the ring, head first. He struck heavily, crumpling up in a little heap, then straightening out, while half a dozen attendants ran to the lad, hastily picking him up and hurrying to the dressing tent with the limp, unconscious form.

CHAPTER XVII

LEFT BEHIND

"Is he hurt much?"

"Don't know. Maybe he's broken his neck."

This brief dialogue ensued between two painted clowns hurrying to their stations.

In the meantime the band struck up a lively air, the clowns launched into a merry medley of song and jest and in a few moments the spectators forgot the scene they had just witnessed, in the noise, the dash and the color. It would come back to them later like some long-past dream.

Mr. Kennedy, with grim, set face, uttered a stern command to Emperor, who for a brief instant had stood irresolute, as if pondering as to whether he should turn and plunge for the red silk curtains behind which his little friend had disappeared in the arms of the attendants.

The trainer's voice won, and Emperor trumpeting loudly, took his way to his quarters without further protest.

In the dressing tent another scene was being enacted. On two drawn-up trunks, over which had been thrown a couple of horse blankets, they had laid the slender, red-clad figure of Phil Forrest.

The boy's pale face appeared even more ashen than it really was under the flickering glare of the gasoline torches. His head had been propped up on a saddle, while about him stood a half circle of solemn-faced performers in various stages of undress and makeup.

"Is he badly hurt?" asked one.

"Can't say. Miaco has gone for the doc. We'll know pretty soon. That was a dandy tumble he took."

"How did it happen?"

"Wire broke. You can't put no faith on a wire with a kink in it. I nearly got my light put out, out in St. Joe, Missouri, by a trick like that. No more swinging wire for me. Guess the kid, if he pulls out of this, will want to hang on to a rope after this. He will if he's wise."

"What's this? What's this?" roared Mr. Sparling, who, having heard of the accident, came rushing into the tent. "Who's hurt?"

"The kid," informed someone.

"What kid? Can't you fellows talk? Oh, it's Forrest, is it? How did it happen?"

One of the performers who had witnessed the accident related what he had observed.

"Huh!" grunted the showman, stepping up beside Phil and placing a hand on the boy's heart.

"Huh!"

"He's alive, isn't he, Mr. Sparling?"

"Yes. Anybody gone for the doctor?"

"Miacco has."

"Wonder any of you had sense enough to think of that. I congratulate you. Somebody will suffer when I find out who was responsible for hanging that boy's life on a rotten old piece of wire. I presume it's been kicking around this outfit for the last seven years."

"Here comes the doc," announced a voice.

There was a tense silence in the dressing tent, broken only by the patter of the rain drops on the canvas roof, while the show's surgeon was making his examination.

"Well, well! What about it?" demanded Mr. Sparling impatiently.

The surgeon did not answer at once. His calm, professional demeanor was not to be disturbed by the blustering but kind-hearted showman, and the showman, knowing this from past experience, relapsed into silence until such time as the surgeon should conclude to answer him.

"Did he fall on his head?" he questioned, looking up, at the same time running his fingers over Phil's dark-brown hair.

"Looks that way, doesn't it?"

"I should say so."

"What's the matter with him?"

"I shall be unable to decide definitely for an hour or so yet, unless he regains consciousness in the meantime. It may be a fracture of the skull or a mere concussion."

"Huh!"

Mr. Sparling would have said more, but for the fact that the calm eyes of the surgeon were fixed upon him in a level gaze.

"Any bones broken?"

"No; I think not. How far did he fall?"

"Fell from Emperor's head when the bull was up in the air. He must have taken all of a twenty-foot dive, I should say."

"Possible? It's a great wonder he didn't break his neck. But he is very well muscled for a boy of his age. I don't suppose they have a hospital in this town?"

"Of course not. They never have anything in these tank towns. You ought to know that by this time."

"They have a hotel. I know for I took dinner there today. If you will get a carriage of some sort I think we had better take him there."

"Leave him, you mean?" questioned Mr. Sparling.

"Yes; that will be best. We can put him in charge of a local physician here. He ought to be able to take care of the boy all right."

"Not by a jug full!" roared Mr. James Sparling. "We'll do nothing of the sort."

"It will not be safe to take him with us, Sparling."

"Did I say it would? Did I? Of course, he shan't be moved, nor will he be left to one of these know-nothing sawbones. You'll stay here with him yourself, and you'll take care of him if you know what's good for you. I'd rather lose most any five men in this show than that boy there."

The surgeon nodded his approval of the sentiment. He, too, had taken quite a fancy to Phil, because of the lad's sunny disposition and natural brightness.

"Get out the coach some of you fellows. Have my driver hook up and drive back into the paddock here, and be mighty quick about it. Here, doc, is a head of lettuce (roll of money). If you need any more, you know where to reach us. Send me a telegram in the morning and another tomorrow night. Keep me posted and pull that boy out of this scrape or you'll be everlastingly out of a job with the Sparling Combined Shows. Understand?"

The surgeon nodded understandingly. He had heard Mr. Sparling bluster on other occasions, and it did not make any great impression upon him.

The carriage was quickly at hand. Circus people were in the habit of obeying orders promptly. A quick drive was made to the hotel, where the circus boy was quickly undressed and put to bed.

All during the night the surgeon worked faithfully over his little charge, and just as the first streaks of daylight slanted through the window and across the white counterpane, Phil opened his eyes.

For only a moment did they remain open, then closed again.

The surgeon drew a long, deep breath.

"Not a fracture," he announced aloud. "I'm thankful for that." He drew the window shades down to shut out the light, as it was all important that Phil should be kept quiet for a time. But the surgeon did not sleep. He sat keen-eyed by the side of the bed, now and then noting the pulse of his patient, touching the lad's cheeks with light fingers.

After a time the fresh morning air, fragrant with the fields and flowers, drifted in, and the birds in the trees took up their morning songs.

"I guess the storm must be over," muttered the medical man, rising softly and peering out from behind the curtain.

The day was dawning bright and beautiful.

"My, it feels good to be in bed!" said a voice from the opposite side of the room. "Where am I?"

The surgeon wheeled sharply.

"You are to keep very quiet. You had a tumble that shook you up considerably."

"What time is it?" demanded Phil sharply.

"About five o'clock in the morning."

"I must get up; I must get up."

"You will lie perfectly still. The show will get along without you today, I guess."

"You don't mean they have gone on and left me?"

"Of course; they couldn't wait for you."

The boy's eyes filled with tears.

"I knew it couldn't last. I knew it."

"See here, do you want to join the show again?"

"Of course, I do."

"Well, then, lie still. The more quiet you keep the sooner you will be able to get out. Try to go to sleep. I must go downstairs and send a message to Mr. Sparling, for he is very much concerned about you."

"Then he will take me back?" asked Phil eagerly.

"Of course he will."

"I'll go to sleep, doctor."

Phil turned over on his side and a moment later was breathing naturally.

The doctor tip-toed from the room and hastened down to the hotel office where he penned the following message:

James Sparling,

Sparling Combined Shows,

Boyertown.

Forrest recovers consciousness. Not a fracture. Expect him to be all right in a few days. Will stay unless further orders.

Irvine.

"I think I'll go upstairs and get a bit of a nap myself," decided the surgeon, after having directed the sleepy clerk to see to it that the message was dispatched to its destination at once.

He found Phil sleeping soundly. Throwing himself into a chair the surgeon, used to getting a catnap whenever and wherever possible, was soon sleeping as soundly as was his young patient.

Neither awakened until the day was nearly done.

CHAPTER XVIII

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

Phil's recovery was rapid, though four days passed before he was permitted to leave his bed. As soon as he was able to get downstairs and sit out on the front porch of the hotel he found himself an object of interest as well as curiosity.

The story of his accident had been talked of until it had grown out of all proportion to the real facts in the case. The boys of the village hung over the porch rail and eyed him wonderingly and admiringly. It did not fall to their lot every day to get acquainted with a real circus boy. They asked him all manner of questions, which the lad answered gladly, for even though he had suffered a severe accident, he was not beyond enjoying the admiration of his fellows.

"It must be great to be a circus boy," marveled one.

"It is until you fall off and crack your head," laughed Phil. "It's not half so funny then."

After returning to his room that day Phil pondered deeply over the accident. He could not understand it.

"Nobody seems to know what really did happen," he mused. "Dr. Irvine says the wire broke. That doesn't seem possible."

Off in the little dog tent of the owner of the show, Mr. James Sparling, on the day following the accident, was asking himself almost the same questions.

He sent for Mr. Kennedy after having disposed of his early morning business. There was a scowl on the owner's face, but it had not been caused by the telegram which lay on the desk before him, informing him that Phil was not seriously hurt. That was a source of keen satisfaction to the showman, for he felt that he could not afford to lose the young circus boy.

Teddy was so upset over it, however, that the boss had about made up his mind to let Phil's companion go back and join him.

While the showman was thinking the matter over, Mr. Kennedy appeared at the opening of the dog tent.

"Morning," he greeted, which was responded to by a muttered "Huh!" from James Sparling.

"Come in. What are you standing out there for?"

Kennedy was so used to this form of salutation that he paid no further attention to it than to obey the summons.

He entered and stood waiting for his employer to speak.

"I want you to tell me exactly what occurred last night, when young Forrest got hurt, Kennedy."

"I can't tell you any more about it than you heard last night. He had started to make his dive before I noticed that anything was wrong. He didn't stop until he landed on his head. They said the wire snapped."

"Did it?"

"I guess so," grinned Kennedy.

"Who is responsible for having picked out that wire?"

"I guess I am."

"And you have the face to stand there and tell me so?"

"I usually tell the truth, don't I?"

"Yes, yes; you do. That's what I like about you."

"Heard from the kid this morning?"

"Yes; he'll be all right in a few days. Concussion and general shaking up; that's all, but it's enough. How are the bulls this morning?"

"Emperor is sour. Got a regular grouch on."

"Misses that young rascal Phil, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"H-m-m-m!"

"Didn't want to come through last night at all."

"H-m-m-m. Guess we'd better fire you and let the boy handle the bulls; don't you think so?"

The trainer grinned and nodded.

"Kennedy, you've been making your brags that you always tell me the truth. I am going to ask you a question, and I want you to see if you can make that boast good."

"Yes, sir."

Perhaps the trainer understood something of what was in his employer's mind, for his lips closed sharply while his jaw took on a belligerent look.

"How did that wire come to break, Kennedy?"

The question came out with a snap, as if the showman already had made up his mind as to what the answer should be.

"It was cut, sir," answered the trainer promptly.

The lines in Mr. Sparling's face drew hard and tense. Instead of a violent outburst of temper, which Kennedy fully expected, the owner sat silently contemplating his trainer for a full minute.

"Who did it?"

"I couldn't guess."

"I didn't ask you to guess. I can guess for myself. I asked who did it?"

"I don't know. I haven't the least idea who would do a job like that in this show. I hope the mean hound will take French leave before I get him spotted, sir."

Mr. Sparling nodded with emphasis.

"I hope so, Kennedy. What makes you think the wire was cut?"

With great deliberation the trainer drew a small package from his inside coat pocket, carefully unwrapped it, placing the contents on the table in front of Mr. Sparling.

"What's this—what's this?"

"That's the wire."

"But there are two pieces here—"

"Yes. I cut off a few feet on each side of where the break occurred. Those are the two."

Mr. Sparling regarded them critically.

"How can you tell that the wire has been cut, except where you cut it yourself?"

"It was cut halfway through with a file, as you can see, sir. When Forrest threw his weight on it, of course the wire parted at the weakened point."

"H-m-m-m."

"If you will examine it, an inch or two above the cut, you will find two or three file marks, where the file started to cut, then was moved down. Probably slipped. Looks like it. Don't you think I'm right, sir?"

Mr. Sparling nodded reflectively.

"There can be no doubt of it. You think it was done between the two performances yesterday?"

"Oh, yes. That cut wouldn't have held through one performance. It was cut during the afternoon."

"Who was in the tent between the shows?"

"Pretty much the whole crowd. But, if you will remember, the day was dark and stormy. There was a time late in the afternoon, before the torches were lighted, when the big top was almost in darkness. It's my idea that the job was done then. Anybody could have done it without being discovered. It's likely there wasn't anybody in the tent except himself at the time."

"Kennedy, I want you to find out who did that. Understand?"

CHAPTER XIX

TEDDY DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF

"The boss has an awful grouch on."

"Yes; I wonder what's the matter with him," pondered the clown.

His brother fun-maker shrugged his shoulders.

"Guess he's mad because of young Forrest's accident. Just got a good act started when he had to go and spoil it."

Not a hint of the suspicion entertained by the owner and his elephant trainer had been breathed about the show. Nearly a week had passed since Phil's narrow escape from death; yet, despite

all the efforts of Kennedy or the shrewd observation of his employer, they were no nearer a solution of the mystery than before. The days passed, and with them the anger of James Sparling increased.

"That chum of Forrest's is a funny fellow," continued the first speaker. "He'd make a good clown?"

"Make? He's one already. Look at him."

Teddy was perched on the back of Jumbo, the trick mule of the show, out in the paddock, where the performers were indulging in various strange antics for the purpose of limbering themselves up prior to entering the ring for their acts.

The bright, warm sunlight was streaming down, picking up little flames from the glistening spangles sprinkled over the costumes of many of the circus folks.

Teddy and Jumbo had become fast friends—a strangely assorted pair, and whenever the opportunity presented itself Teddy would mount the ugly looking mule, riding him about the paddock or the ring when there was nothing going on under the big top. Every time the pair made their appearance it was the signal for a shout of merriment from the performers.

Teddy had perched himself on Jumbo's back while the mule was awaiting his turn to enter the ring, which he did alone, performing his act with nothing save the crack of the ringmaster's whip to guide him.

Somebody had jammed a clown's cap on Teddy's head, while someone else had hit it a smash with the flat of his hand, until the peak of the cap lopped over to one side disconsolately.

Teddy's face wore an appreciative grin, Jumbo's long ears lying as far back on his head as they would reach. To the ordinary observer it might have been supposed that the mule was angry about something. On the contrary, it was his way of showing his pleasure. When a pan of oats was thrust before Jumbo, or he chanced upon a patch of fresh, tender grass, the ears expressed the animal's satisfaction.

Jumbo could do pretty much everything except talk, but occasionally the stubbornness of his kind took possession of him. At such times the trick mule was wont to do the most erratic things.

"How'd you like to ride him in?" chuckled Miaco, who stood regarding the lad with a broad smile.

"If I had a saddle I wouldn't mind it," grinned Teddy's funny face as an accompaniment to his words.

Jumbo's equipment consisted of a cinch girth and a pair of bridle reins connected with a headstall. There was no bit, but the effect was to arch his neck like that of a proud stallion.

"You'd make the hit of your life if you did," laughed Miaco. "Wonder the boss don't have you do it."

"Would if he knew about it," spoke up a performer. "The really funny things don't get into the ring in a circus, unless by accident."

In the meantime the ringmaster was making his loud-voiced announcement out under the big top.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he roared, after a loud crack of his long-lashed whip, to attract the attention of the people to him, "we are now about to introduce the wonderful performing mule Jumbo, the only broncho-bucking, bobtailed mule in the world. You will notice that he performs without a rider, without human interference. Please do not speak to Jumbo while he is going through his act. Ladies and gentlemen, Jumbo, the great educated mule, will now make his appearance unaided by human hand."

The audience applauded the announcement.

At that moment the band struck up the tune by which Jumbo always made his entrance. At the first blare of the brass a fun-loving clown jabbed Jumbo with a pin. The mule did the rest.

"Here! Here! Get off that mule!" shouted the animal's trainer. "He's going on!"

"Let him go!" roared clowns and other performers.

Jumbo had never made as quick a start in all his circus career as he did that day. He fairly leaped into the air, though only one man understood the reason for the mule's sudden move.

With a bray that was heard all over the big top Jumbo burst through the red curtains like a tornado. There he paused for one brief instant, as if uncertain whether to do a certain thing or not.

Recalling the ringmaster's words, the spectators at first were at a loss to account for the odd-looking figure that was clinging to

the back of the educated mule.

Suddenly they broke out into roars of laughter, while the performers peering through the red curtain fairly howled with delight.

Teddy was hanging to the cinch girth uncertain what to do. The ringmaster, amazed beyond words, stood gaping at the spectacle, for the moment powerless to use his usually ready tongue.

Jumbo launched into the arena.

"Get off!" thundered the ringmaster, suddenly recovering himself.

"I can't!" howled Teddy, though from present indications it appeared as if he would dismount without any effort on his own part.

Jumbo's heels flew into the air, then began a series of lunges, bucking and terrific kicking such as none among the vast audience ever had witnessed in or out of a show ring.

One instant Teddy would be standing on his head on the mule's back, the next lying on his back with feet toward the animal's head. Next he would be dragged along the ground, to be plumped back again at the next bounce.

No feat seemed too difficult for Jumbo to attempt that day.

"Stop him! Stop him!" howled the ringmaster.

Ring attendants rushed forward to obey his command, but they might as well have tried to stop a tornado. Jumbo eluded them without the least trouble, but their efforts to keep out of range of his flying hoofs were not so easy. Some of them had narrow escapes from being seriously injured.

Mr. Sparling, attracted by the roars of laughter of the audience and the unusual disturbance, had hurried into the big top, where he stood, at first in amazement, then with a broad grin overspreading his countenance.

Now Jumbo began a race with himself about the arena, following the concourse, now and then sending his heels into the air right over the heads of the spectators of the lower row of seats, sending them scrambling under the seats for protection.

A clown ran out with half a dozen paper covered hoops, which he was holding in readiness for the next bareback act.

He flaunted them in the face of the runaway mule.

Jumbo ducked his head under them and Teddy Tucker's head went through the paper with a crash, the mule's heels at that instant being high in the air.

With the rings hung about his neck, Teddy cut a more ridiculous figure than ever. The audience went wild with excitement.

Now the ringmaster, angered beyond endurance, began reaching for Teddy with the long lash of his whip. The business end of the lash once brushed the boy's cheek.

It stung him.

"Ouch!" howled Teddy as he felt the lash.

"Stop that!" exploded Mr. Sparling, who, by this time, had gotten into the ring to take a hand in the performance himself. He grabbed the irate ringmaster by the collar, giving him a jerk that that functionary did not forget in a hurry.

Jumbo, however, was no respecter of persons. He had taken a short cut across the ring just as the owner had begun his correction of the ringmaster. Jumbo shook out his heels again. They caught the owner's sombrero and sent it spinning into the air.

Mr. Sparling, in his excitement, forgot all about the ringmaster. Picking up a tent stake, he hurled it after the educated mule, missing him by a full rod.

The audience by this time was in a tempest of excitement. At first they thought it was all a part of the show. But they were soon undeceived, which made their enjoyment and appreciation all the greater.

Jumbo took a final sprint about the arena, Teddy's legs and free arm most of the time in the air. He had long since lost his clown's cap, which Jumbo, spying, had kicked off into the audience.

"You fool mule! You fool mule!" bellowed Mr. Sparling.

Jumbo suddenly decided that he would go back to the paddock. With him, to decide was to act. Taking a fresh burst of speed, he shot straight at the red curtains. To reach these he was obliged to pass close to the bandstand, where the band was playing as if the very existence of the show depended upon them.

Teddy's grip was relaxing. His arm was so benumbed that he could not feel that he had any arm on that side at all.

His fingers slowly relaxed their grip on the cinch girth. In a moment he had bounced back to the educated mule's rump. In another instant he would be plumped to the hard ground with a jolt that would shake him to his foundations.

But Jumbo had other plans—more spectacular plans—in mind. He put them into execution at once. The moment he felt his burden slipping over his back that active end grew busy again. Jumbo humped himself, letting out a volley of kicks so lightning-like in their swiftness that human eye could not follow.

Teddy had slipped half over the mule's rump when the volley began.

"Catch him! He'll be killed!" shouted someone.

All at once the figure of Teddy Tucker shot straight up into the air, propelled there by the educated mule. The lad's body described what somebody afterwards characterized as "graceful somersault in the air," then began its downward flight.

He landed right in the midst of the band.

Crash!

There was a yell of warning, a jingle and clatter of brass, several chairs went down under the impact, the floor gave way and half the band, with Teddy Tucker in the middle of the heap, sank out of sight.

CHAPTER XX

THE RETURN TO THE SAWDUST LIFE

"Is he dead?"

"No; you can't kill a thick-head like that," snarled the ringmaster.

The audience was still roaring.

With angry imprecations the members of the band who had fallen through were untangling themselves as rapidly as possible. Teddy,

in the meantime, had dragged himself from beneath the heap and slunk out from under the broken platform. He lost no time in escaping to the paddock, but the bandmaster, espying him, started after the lad, waving his baton threateningly.

No sooner had Teddy gained the seclusion of the dressing tent than James Sparling burst in.

"Where's that boy? Where's that boy?"

"Here he is," grinned a performer, thrusting Teddy forward, much against the lad's inclinations.

Mr. Sparling surveyed him with narrow eyes.

"You young rascal! Trying to break up my show, are you?"

"N-no-sir."

"Can you do that again, do you think?"

"I-I don't know."

"That's the greatest Rube mule act that ever hit a sawdust ring. I'll double your salary if you think you can get away with it every performance," fairly shouted the owner.

"I-I'm willing if the mule is," stammered Teddy somewhat doubtfully.

As a result the lad left his job in the cook tent, never to return to it. After many hard knocks and some heavy falls he succeeded in so mastering the act that he was able to go through with it without great risk of serious injury to himself. The educated mule and the boy became a feature of the Sparling Combined Shows from that moment on, but after that Teddy took good care not to round off his act by a high dive into the big bass horn.

No one was more delighted at Teddy Tucker's sudden leap to fame than was his companion, Phil Forrest. Phil and Dr. Irvine returned to the show, one afternoon, about a week after the accident. They had come on by train.

Phil, though somewhat pale after his setback, was clear-eyed, and declared himself as fit as ever. He insisted upon going on with his act at the evening performance, but Mr. Sparling told him to wait until the day following. In the meantime Phil could get his apparatus in working order.

"I'll look it over myself this time," announced the showman. "I don't want any more such accidents happening in this show. Your friend Teddy nearly put the whole outfit to the bad—he and the fool mule."

That afternoon Phil had an opportunity to witness for himself the exhibition of his companion and the "fool mule." He laughed until his sides ached.

"O Teddy, you'll break your neck doing that stunt one of these times," warned Phil, hastening back to the dressing tent after Teddy and the mule had left the ring.

"Don't you think it's worth the risk?"

"That depends."

"For two dollars a day?"

"Is that what you are getting?"

"Yep. I'm a high-priced performer," insisted Teddy, snapping his trousers pocket significantly. "I'd jump off the big top, twice every day, for that figure."

"What are you going to do with all your money? Spend it?"

"I—rather thought I'd buy a bicycle."

Phil shook his head.

"You couldn't carry it, and, besides, nobody rides bicycles these days. They ride in automobiles."

"Then I'll buy one of them."

"I'll tell you what you do, Teddy."

"Lend the money to you, eh?"

"No; I am earning plenty for myself. But every week, now, I shall send all my money home to Mrs. Cahill. I wrote to her about it while I was sick. She is going to put it in the bank for me at Edmeston, with herself appointed as trustee. That's necessary, you see, because I am not of age. Then no one can take it away from me."

"You mean your Uncle Abner?" questioned Teddy.

"Yes. I don't know that he would want to; but I'm not taking any chances. Now, why not send your money along at the same time? Mrs. Cahill will deposit it in the same way, and at the end of the season think what a lot of money you will have?"

"Regular fortune?"

"Yes, a regular fortune."

"What'll I do with all that money?"

"Do what I'm going to do—get an education."

"What, and leave the show business? No, siree!"

"I didn't mean that. You can go to school between seasons. I don't intend to leave the show business, but I'm going to know something besides that."

"Well, I guess it would be a good idea," reflected Teddy.

"Will you do it?"

"Yes; I'll do it," he nodded.

"Good for you! We'll own a show of our own, one of these days. You mark me, Teddy," glowed Phil.

"Of our own?" marveled Teddy, his face wreathing in smiles. "Say, wouldn't that be great?"

"I think so. Have you been practicing on the rings since I left?"

"No."

"That's too bad. You and I will begin tomorrow. We ought to be pretty expert on the flying rings in a few weeks, if I don't get hurt again," added the boy, a shadow flitting across his face.

"Then, you'd better begin by taking some bends," suggested Mr. Miaco, who, approaching, had overheard Phil's remark.

"Bends?" questioned Teddy

"What are they?" wondered Phil. "Oh, I know. I read about them in the papers. It's an attack that fellows working in a tunnel get when they're digging under a river. I don't want anything like that."

"No, no, no," replied Mr. Miaco in a tone of disgust. "It's no disease at all."

"No?"

"What I mean by bends is exercises. You have seen the performers do it—bend forward until their hands touch the ground, legs stiff, then tipping as far backwards as possible. Those are bending exercises, and the best things to do. The performers limber up for their act that way. If you practice it slowly several times a day you will be surprised to see what it will do for you. I'd begin today were I in your place, Phil. You'll find yourself a little stiff when you go on in your elephant act tonight—"

"I'm not going on tonight—not until tomorrow. Mr. Sparling doesn't wish me to."

"All right. All the better. Exercise! I wouldn't begin on the rings today either. Just take your bends, get steady on your feet and start in in a regular, systematic way tomorrow," advised the head clown.

"Thank you, Mr. Miaco; I shall do so. I am much obliged to you. You are very kind to us."

"Because I like you, and because you boys don't pretend to know more about the circus business than men who have spent their lives in it."

"I hope I shall never be like that," laughed Phil. "I know I shall always be willing to learn."

"And there always is something to learn in the circus life. None of us knows it all. There are new things coming up every day," added the clown.

Phil left the dressing tent to go around to the menagerie tent for a talk with Mr. Kennedy and Emperor. Entering the tent the lad gave his whistle signal, whereat Emperor trumpeted loudly.

The big elephant greeted his young friend with every evidence of joy and excitement. Phil, of course, had brought Emperor a bag of peanuts as well as several lumps of sugar, and it was with difficulty that the lad got away from him after finishing his chat with Mr. Kennedy.

Phil was making a round of calls that afternoon, so he decided that he would next visit Mr. Sparling, having seen him only a

moment, and that while others were around.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Yes; what do you want?"

"To thank you for your kindness."

"Didn't I tell you never to thank me for anything?" thundered the showman.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I'll take it all back," twinkled Phil.

"Oh, you will, will you, young scapegrace? What did you come here for anyway? Not to palaver about how thankful you are that you got knocked out, stayed a week in bed and had your salary paid all the time. I'll bet you didn't come for that. Want a raise of salary already?"

"Hardly. If you'll give me a chance, I'll tell you, Mr. Sparling."

"Go on. Say it quick."

"I have been thinking about the fall I got, since I've been laid up."

"Nothing else to think about, eh?"

"And the more I think about it, the more it bothers me."

"Does, eh?" grunted Mr. Sparling, busying himself with his papers.

"Yes, sir. I don't suppose it would be possible for me to get the broken wire now, would it? No doubt it was thrown away."

The showman peered up at the boy suspiciously.

"What do you want of it?"

"I thought I should like to examine it."

"Why?"

"To see what had been done to it."

"Oh, you do, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"What do you think happened to that wire? It broke, didn't it?"

"Yes, I guess there is no doubt about it but somebody helped to break it."

"Young man, you are too confoundedly smart. Mark my words, you'll die young. Yes; I have the wire. Here it is. Look at it. You are right; something happened to it, and I've been tearing myself to pieces, ever since, to find out who it was. I've got all my amateur sleuths working on the case, this very minute, to find out who the scoundrel is who cut the wire. Have you any idea about it? But there's no use in asking you. I—"

"I've got this," answered Phil, tossing a small file on the table in front of Mr. Sparling.

"What, what, what? A file?"

"Yes, will you see if it fits the notch in the wire there?"

The showman did so, holding file and wire up to the light for a better examination of them.

"There can be no doubt of it," answered the amazed showman, fixing wondering eyes on the young man. "Where did you get it?"

"Picked it up."

"Where?"

"In the dressing tent."

"Pooh! Then it doesn't mean anything," grunted Mr. Sparling.

"If you knew where I picked it up you might think differently."

"Then where did you get it?"

"Found it in my own trunk."

"In your trunk?"

Phil nodded.

"How did it get there?"

"I had left my trunk open after placing some things in it. When I went out to watch Teddy's mule act I was in such a hurry that I

forgot all about the trunk. When I came back, there it lay, near the end—”

”Somebody put it there!” exploded the showman.

”Yes.”

”But who? Find that out for me—let me know who the man is and you’ll hear an explosion in this outfit that will raise the big top right off the ground.”

”Leave it to me, Mr. Sparling, I’ll find him.”

The owner laughed harshly.

”How?”

”I think I know who the man is at this very minute,” was Phil Forrest’s startling announcement, uttered in a quiet, even tone.

Mr. Sparling leaped from his chair so suddenly that he overturned the table in front of him, sending his papers flying all over the place.

CHAPTER XXI

AN ELEPHANT IN JAIL

”Who is he?”

”I would not care to answer that question just now, Mr. Sparling,” answered Phil calmly. ”It would not be right—that is, not until I am sure about it.”

”Tell me, or get out.”

”Remember, Mr. Sparling, it is a serious accusation you ask me to make against a man on proof that you would say was not worth anything. It may take some time, but before I get through I’m going either to fasten the act on someone—on a particular one—or else prove that I am wholly mistaken.”

The showman stormed, but Phil was obdurate. He refused to give the slightest intimation as to whom he suspected.

"Am I to go, Mr. Sparling?" he asked after the interview had come to an end.

"No! I expect you'll own this show yet."

He watched Phil walking away from the tent. There was a scowl on the face of James Sparling.

"If I thought that young rascal really thought he knew, I'd take him across my knee and spank him until he told me. No; he's more of a man than any two in the whole outfit. I'd rather lose a horse than have anything happen to that lad."

Days followed each other in quick succession. The show had by this time swung around into Pennsylvania, and was playing a circuit of small mining towns with exceptionally good attendance. The owner of the show was in high good humor over the profits the show was earning. The acts of Phil Forrest and Teddy Tucker had proved to be among the best drawing cards in the circus performance proper. So important did the owner consider them that the names of the two circus boys were now prominently displayed in the advertisements, as well as on the billboards.

During all this time, Phil and Teddy had worked faithfully on the rings under the instruction of Mr. Miaco. On the side they were taking lessons in tumbling as well. For this purpose what is known as a "mechanic" was used to assist them in their schooling. This consisted of a belt placed about the beginner's waist. From it a rope led up over a pulley, the other end of the rope being securely held by someone.

When all was ready the pupil would take a running start, jump into the air and try to turn. At the same time, the man holding the free end of the rope would give it a hard pull, thus jerking the boy free of the ground and preventing his falling on his head.

After a few days of this, both boys had progressed so far that they were able to work on a mat, made up of several layers of thick carpet, without the aid of the "mechanic." Of course their act lacked finish. Their movements were more or less clumsy, but they had mastered the principle of the somersault in remarkably quick time.

Mr. Miaco said that in two more weeks they ought to be able to join the performers in their general tumbling act, which was one of the features of the show.

There was not an hour of the day that found the two boys idle, now, and all this activity was viewed by Mr. Sparling with an

approving eye.

But one day there came an interruption that turned the thoughts of the big show family in another direction.

An accident had happened at the morning parade that promised trouble for the show. A countryman, who had heard that the hide of an elephant could not be punctured, was struck by the happy thought of finding out for himself the truth or falsity of this theory. He had had an argument with some of his friends, he taking the ground that an elephant's hide was no different from the hide of any other animal. And he promised to show them that it was not.

All he needed was the opportunity. With his friends he had followed along with the parade, keeping abreast of the elephants, until finally the parade was halted by the crossing gates at a railroad.

Now was the man's chance to prove the theory false. The crowd closed in on the parade to get a closer view of the people, and this acted as a cover for the man's experiment.

Taking his penknife out he placed the point of it against the side of Emperor, as it chanced.

"Now watch me," he said, at the same time giving the knife a quick shove, intending merely to see if he could prick through the skin. His experiment succeeded beyond the fellow's fondest expectations. The point of the knife had gone clear through Emperor's hide.

Emperor, ordinarily possessed of a keen sense of humor, coupled with great good nature, in this instance failed to see the humor of the proceeding. In fact, he objected promptly and in a most surprising manner.

Like a flash, his trunk curled back. It caught the bold experimenter about the waist, and the next instant the fellow was dangling in the air over Emperor's head, yelling lustily for help. The elephant had been watching the man, apparently suspecting something, and therefore was ready for him.

"Put him down!" thundered Kennedy.

The elephant obeyed, but in a manner not intended by the trainer when he gave the command.

With a quick sweep of his trunk, Emperor hurled his tormentor from him. The man's body did not stop until it struck a large

plate glass window in a store front, disappearing into the store amid a terrific crashing of glass and breaking of woodwork, the man having carried most of the window with him in his sudden entry into the store.

This was a feature of the parade that had not been advertised on the bills.

The procession moved on a moment later, with old Emperor swinging along as meekly as if he had not just stirred up a heap of trouble for himself and his owner.

The man, it was soon learned, had been badly hurt.

But Mr. Sparling was on the ground almost at once, making an investigation. He quickly learned what had caused the trouble. And then he was mad all through. He raved up and down the line threatening to get out a warrant for the arrest of the man who had stuck a knife into his elephant.

Later in the afternoon matters took a different turn. A lawyer called on the showman, demanding the payment of ten thousand dollars damages for the injuries sustained by his client, and which, he said, would in all probability make the man a cripple for life.

If the showman had been angry before, he was in a towering rage now.

"Get off this lot!" he roared. "If you show your face here again I'll set the canvassmen on you! Then you won't be able to leave without help."

The lawyer stood not upon the order of his going, and they saw no more of him. They had about concluded that they had heard the last of his demands, until just before the evening performance, when, as the cook tent was being struck, half a dozen deputy sheriffs suddenly made their appearance.

They held papers permitting them to levy on anything they could lay their hands upon and hold it until full damages had been fixed by the courts.

There was no trifling with the law, at least not then, and Mr. Sparling was shrewd enough to see that. However, he stormed and threatened, but all to no purpose.

The intelligent deputies reasoned that Emperor, having been the cause of all the trouble, would be the proper chattel to levy

upon. So they levied on him.

The next thing was to get Emperor to jail. He would not budge an inch when the officers sought to take him. Then a happy thought struck them. They ordered the trainer to lead the elephant and follow them under pain of instant arrest if he refused.

There was nothing for it but to obey. Protesting loudly, Kennedy started for the village with his great, hulking charge.

Phil Forrest was as disconsolate as his employer was enraged. The boy's act was spoiled, perhaps indefinitely, which might mean the loss of part of his salary.

"That's country justice," growled the owner. "But I'll telegraph my lawyer in the city and have him here by morning. Maybe it won't be such a bad speculation tomorrow, for I'll make this town go broke before it has fully settled the damages I'll get out of it. Don't be down in the mouth, Forrest. You'll have your elephant back, and before many days at that. Go watch the show and forget your troubles."

It will be observed that, under his apparently excitable exterior, Mr. James Sparling was a philosopher.

"Emperor's in jail," mourned Phil.

The moment Mr. Kennedy returned, sullen and uncommunicative, Phil sought him out. He found the trainer in Mr. Sparling's tent.

"Where did they take him?" demanded Phil, breaking in on their conversation.

"To jail," answered Kennedy grimly. "First time I ever heard of such a thing as an elephant's going to jail."

"That's the idea. We'll use that for an advertisement," cried the ever alert showman, slapping his thighs. "Emperor, the performing elephant of the Great Sparling Combined Shows, jailed for assault. Fine, fine! How'll that look in the newspapers? Why, men, it will fill the tent when we get to the next stand, whether we have the elephant or not."

"No; you've got to have the elephant," contended Kennedy.

"Well, perhaps that's so. But I'll wire our man ahead, just the same, and let him use the fact in his press notices."

"But how could they get him in the jail?" questioned Phil.

"Jail? You see, they couldn't. They wanted to, but the jail wouldn't fit, or the elephant wouldn't fit the jail, either way you please. When they discovered that they didn't know what to do with him. Somebody suggested that they might lock him up in the blacksmith shop."

"The blacksmith shop?" exploded the owner.

"I hope they don't try to fit him with shoes," he added, with a grim smile.

"Well, maybe it wouldn't be so bad if they did. We'd have our elephant right quick. Yes, they tried the blacksmith shop on, and it worked, but it was a close fit. If Emperor had had a bump on his back as big as an egg he wouldn't have gone in."

"And he's there now?"

"Yes. I reckon I'd better stay here and camp at the hotel, hadn't I, so's to be handy when your lawyer comes on? Emperor might tear up the town if he got loose."

Mr. Sparling reflected for a moment.

"Kennedy, you'll go with the show tonight. I don't care if Emperor tears this town up by the roots. If none of us is here, then we shall not be to blame for what happens. We didn't tell them to lock him up in the blacksmith shop. You can get back after the lawyer has gotten him out. That will be time enough."

"Where is the blacksmith shop?" questioned Phil.

"Know where the graveyard is?"

"Yes."

"It's just the other side of that," said Kennedy. "Church on this side, blacksmith shop on the other. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. I was just wondering," answered Phil, glancing up and finding the eyes of Mr. Sparling bent keenly upon him.

The lad rose hastily, went out, and climbing up to the seat of a long pole wagon, sat down to ponder over the situation. He remained there until a teamster came to hook to the wagon and drive it over to be loaded. Then Phil got down, standing about with hands in his pockets.

He was trying to make up his mind about something.

"Where do we show tomorrow?" he asked of an employee.

"Dobbsville, Ohio. We'll be over the line before daybreak."

"Oh."

The circus tent was rapidly disappearing now. "In another state in the morning," mused Phil.

One by one the wagons began moving from the circus lot.

"Get aboard the sleeping car," called the driver of the wagon that Phil and Teddy usually slept in, as he drove past.

"Hey, Phil!" called Teddy, suddenly appearing above the top of the box.

"Hello, Teddy!"

"What are you standing there for?"

"Perhaps I'm getting the night air," laughed Phil. "Fine, isn't it?"

"It might be better. But get in; get in. You'll be left."

"Never mind me. I am not going on your wagon tonight. You may have the bed all to yourself. Don't forget to leave your window open," he jeered.

"I have it open already. I'm going to put the screen in now to keep the mosquitoes out," retorted Teddy, not to be outdone.

"Has Mr. Sparling gone yet do you know?"

"No; he and Kennedy are over yonder where the front door was, talking."

"All right."

Teddy's head disappeared. No sooner had it done so than Phil Forrest turned and ran swiftly toward the opposite side of the lot. He ran in a crouching position, as if to avoid being seen.

Reaching a fence which separated the road from the field, he threw himself down in the tall grass there and hid.

"In Ohio tomorrow. I'm going to try it," he muttered. "It can't be wrong. They had no business, no right to do it," he decided,

his voice full of indignation.

He heard the wagons rumbling by him on the hard road, the rattle of wheels accompanied by the shouts of the drivers as they urged their horses on.

And there Phil lay hidden until every wagon had departed, headed for the border, and the circus lot became a barren, deserted and silent field.

CHAPTER XXII

EMPEROR ANSWERS THE SIGNAL

Making sure that everybody had left, Phil Forrest ran swiftly toward the village. He knew the way, having been downtown during the day.

A light twinkled here and there in a house, where the people, no doubt, were discussing the exciting events of the day. As Phil drew near the cemetery he heard voices.

It would not do to be discovered, so the lad climbed the fence and crept along the edge of the open plot. He was nearing the blacksmith shop and it was soon apparent to him that quite a number of men had gathered in front of the shop itself.

Skulking up to the corner, the last rod being traversed on all fours, the circus boy flattened himself on the ground to listen, in an effort to learn if possible what were the plans of the villagers. If they had any he did not learn them, for their conversation was devoted principally to discussing what they had done to the Sparling show and what they would do further before they had finished with this business.

Phil did learn, however, that the man who had been hurled through the store window was not fatally injured, as had been thought at first. Someone announced that the doctor had said the man would be about again in a couple of weeks.

"I'm glad of that," muttered Phil. "I shouldn't like to think that Emperor had killed anyone. I wonder how he likes it in there."

Evidently the elephant was not well pleased, for the lad could hear him stirring restlessly and tugging at his chains.

"Won't he be surprised, though?" chuckled Phil. "I shouldn't be surprised if he made a lot of noise. I hope he doesn't, for I don't want to stir the town up. I wonder if those fellows are going to stay there all night?"

The loungers showed no inclination to move, so there was nothing for the boy to do but to lie still and wait.

After a little he began to feel chilled, and began hopping around on hands and feet to start his blood moving. A little of this warmed him up considerably. This time he sat down in the fence corner. The night was moonless, but the stars were quite bright, enabling Phil to make out objects some distance away. He could see quite plainly the men gathered in front of the blacksmith shop.

After a wait of what seemed hours to Phil, one of the watchers stirred himself.

"Well, fellows, we might as well go home. The brute's settled down for the night, I reckon."

"What time is it?"

"Half past two," announced the first speaker.

"Well, well, I should say it was time to go. Not going to stay with him, are you, sheriff?"

"Not necessary. He can't get out."

After listening at the closed door, the one whom Phil judged to be an officer joined his companions and all walked leisurely down the road.

The lad remained in the fence corner for sometime, but he stood up after they had gone. He did not dare move about much, fearing that Emperor might hear and know him and raise a great tumult.

Phil waited all of half an hour; then he climbed the fence and slipped cautiously to the door of the shop.

It was securely locked.

"Oh, pshaw! That's too bad," grumbled the lad. "How am I going to do it?"

Phil ran his fingers lightly over the fastening, which consisted of a strong hasp and a padlock.

"What shall I do? I dare not try to break the lock. I should be committing a crime if I did. Perhaps I am already. No; I'm not, and I shall not. I'll just speak to Emperor, then start off on foot after the show. It was foolish of me to think I could do anything to help Mr. Sparling and the elephant out of his trouble. I ought to be able to walk to the next stand and get there in time for the last breakfast call, providing I can find the way."

Perhaps Phil's conscience troubled him a little, though he had done nothing worse than to follow the dictates of his kind heart in his desire to be of assistance to his employer and to befriend old Emperor.

Placing his lips close to the door, Phil called softly.

"Emperor!" he said.

The restless swaying and heavy breathing within ceased suddenly.

"Emperor!" repeated the lad, at the same time uttering the low whistle that the big elephant had come to know so well.

A mighty cough from the interior of the blacksmith shop answered Phil Forrest's signal.

"Be quiet, Emperor. Be quiet! We are going to get you out as soon as we can, old fellow! You just behave yourself now. Do you hear?"

Emperor emitted another loud cough.

"Good old Emperor. I've got some peanuts for you, but I don't know how I am going to give them to you. Wait a minute. Perhaps there is a window somewhere that I can toss them through."

Phil, after looking around, found a window with the small panes of glass missing. The window was so high that he could not reach it, so he stood on the ground and tossed the peanuts in, while the big elephant demonstrated the satisfaction he felt, in a series of sharp intakes of breath.

"Now I'm going," announced Phil. "Goodbye, Emperor. Here's a lump of sugar. That's all I have for you."

Phil turned away sorrowfully. His purpose had failed. Not because he doubted his ability to carry it out, but he was not sure that he would be right in doing so.

A few rods down the road he paused, turned and uttered his shrill signal whistle, with no other idea in mind than to bring some comfort to the imprisoned beast.

Emperor interpreted the signal otherwise, however. He uttered a loud, shrill trumpet; then things began to happen with a rapidity that fairly made the circus boy's head whirl.

A sudden jingle of metal, a crashing and rending from within the shop, caused Phil to halt sharply after he had once more started on his way.

Crash! Bang!

Emperor had brought his wonderful strength to bear on his flimsily constructed prison with disastrous results to the latter. First he had torn the blacksmith's bellows out by the roots and hurled it from him. Next he set to work to smash everything within reach. A moment of this and the elephant had freed himself from the light chains with which the keeper had secured him.

"Wha-oh, what is he doing?" gasped Phil Forrest.

The boards on one side of the shop burst out as from a sudden explosion. Down came half a dozen of the light studdings that supported the roof on that side.

By this time Emperor had worked himself into a fine temper. He turned his attention to the other side of the shop with similar disastrous results. The interior of the blacksmith shop was a wreck. It could not have been in much worse condition had it been struck by a cyclone.

All of a sudden the elephant threw his whole weight against the big sliding door. It burst out with a report like that of a cannon.

Emperor came staggering out into the open. There he paused, with twitching ears and curling trunk, peering into the darkness in search of Phil Forrest.

Phil recovered from his surprise sufficiently to realize what had happened and that old Emperor was free once more.

The lad uttered a shrill whistle. Emperor responded by a piercing scream. He then whirled, facing up the road in Phil's direction, though unable to see the lad.

Once more the boy whistled. Emperor was off in a twinkling.

"Steady, steady, Emperor!" cautioned the lad, as he saw the huge hulk bearing swiftly down on him. "Easy, old boy!"

But the elephant did not lessen his speed one particle. Phil felt sure, however, that he himself would not be harmed. He knew Emperor too well. With perfect confidence in the great animal, the lad threw both hands above his head, standing motionless in the center of the street right in the path of the oncoming beast.

"Steady, steady, steady!" cautioned Phil. "Now up, Emperor!"

The elephant's long, sinuous trunk uncurled, coiled about the lad's waist and the next instant Phil felt himself being lifted to the big beast's head.

"I've got him!" shouted Phil, carried away by the excitement of the moment. "Now, go it! Emperor! Go faster than you ever have since you chased lions in the jungle."

And Emperor did go it! As he tore down the village street he woke the echoes with his shrill trumpetings, bringing every man and woman in the little village tumbling from their beds.

"The elephant is escaping!" cried the people, as they threw up their windows and gazed out. As they looked they saw a huge, shadowy shape hurling itself down the street, whereat they hastily withdrew their heads. In a few moments the men of the village came rushing out, all running toward the blacksmith shop to learn what had happened there. There followed a perfect pandemonium of yells when they discovered the wrecked condition of the place.

In the meantime Phil had guided Emperor into the road that led to the show grounds of the previous day. The elephant was about to turn into the lot, when a sharp slap from his rider caused him to swing back into the highway on the trail of the wagons that had passed on some hours before.

Once he had fairly started Emperor followed the trail, making the turns and following the twists of the road as unerringly as an Indian follows the trail of his enemy.

"Hurrah!" shouted Phil, after they had got clear of the village. "I've won, I've won! But, oh, won't there be a row back there when they find out what has happened, I wonder if they will follow us."

The thought startled him.

"If they do they are liable to arrest me, believing that I let him out. _Go it, _ Emperor! Go faster!"

Emperor flapped his ears in reply and swung off at an increased gait. The darkness of early morn was soon succeeded by the graying dawn, and Phil felt a certain sense of relief as he realized that day was breaking. On they swept, past hamlets, by farm houses, where here and there men with milkpails in hand paused, startled, to rub their eyes and gaze upon the strange outfit that was rushing past them at such a pace.

Phil could not repress a chuckle at such times, at thought of the sensation he was creating.

The hours drew on until seven o'clock had arrived, and the sun was high in the heavens.

"I must be getting near the place," decided Phil. He knew he was on the right road, for he could plainly see the trail of the wagons and of the stock in the dust of the road before him.

"Yes; there is some sort of a village way off yonder. I wonder if that is it?"

A fluttering flag from the top of a far away center-pole, which he caught sight of a few minutes later, told the boy that it was.

"Hurrah!" shouted Phil, waving his hat on high.

At that moment a distant chorus of yells smote his ears. The lad listened intently. The shout was repeated. Holding fast to the headstall, he glanced back over the road. There, far to his rear, he discovered a cloud of dust, which a few minutes later resolved itself into a party of horsemen, riding at top speed.

"They're after me! Go faster! Go faster!" shouted the lad. As he spoke a rifle cracked somewhere behind him, but as Phil heard no bullet the leaden missile must have fallen far short of the mark.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MYSTERY SOLVED

As he neared the village Phil began to shout and wave his hat.

After a time his shouts attracted the attention of some of the people on the circus lot, which was on his side of the village.

"It's Emperor coming back!" cried someone. "There's somebody on him," added another.

"I'll bet the day's receipts that it's that rascally Phil Forrest," exclaimed Mr. Sparling, examining the cloud of dust with shaded eyes. "How in the world did it ever happen? I've been hunting all over the outfit for that boy this morning. Young Tucker said he thought Phil had remained behind, and I was afraid something had happened to the boy or that he had skipped the show. I might have known better. What's that back of him?"

"Somebody chasing them, boss," a tentman informed him.

"And they're going to catch old Emperor sure."

"Not if I know it," snapped Mr. Sparling. "_ Hey, Rube!" _ he howled.

Canvassmen, roustabouts, performers and everybody within reach of his voice swarmed out into the open, armed with clubs, stones and anything they could lay their hands upon.

"There's a posse trying to catch Phil Forrest and old Emperor. Get a going! Head them off and drive them back!"

Every man started on a run, some leaping on horses, clearing the circus lot, riding like so many cowboys. As they approached the lad perched on the bobbing head of the elephant the showmen set up a chorus of wild yells, to which Phil responded by waving his hat. He tried to stand up on Emperor's head, narrowly missing a tumble, which he surely would have taken had not the elephant given him quick support with the ever-handy trunk.

"They're shooting at me," cried Phil, as he swept by the showmen.

"Line up!" commanded Mr. Sparling.

His men stretched across the highway, with the mounted ones in front, his infantry behind. Soon the horsemen of the pursuing party came dashing up and brought their horses to a sudden stop.

"What do you want?"

"We demand the turning over of the elephant which one of your men stole from us. They've wrecked the blacksmith shop and there'll be a pretty bill of damages to pay! Come now, before we take you

back with us.”

Mr. Sparling grinned.

”Perhaps you don’t know that you are in the State of Ohio at the present moment, eh? If you’ll take my advice you’ll turn about and get home as fast as horseflesh will carry you. My lawyer will be in your town today, and he will arrange for the payment of all just damages. We decline to be robbed, however. We’ve got the elephant and we’re going to keep him.”

”And we’re going to have the boy that broke in and released him.”

”Ho, ho, ho!” laughed Mr. Sparling jovially. ”I guess you’ll have the liveliest scrimmage you ever had in all your lives if you attempt to lay hands on that boy. Come, now, get out of here! If you attempt to raise the slightest disturbance I’ll have the bunch of you in the cooler, and we’ll be the boys to put you there if the town officials don’t act quickly enough.”

”Boys, I guess it’s up to us,” decided the leader of the party.

”Looks that way.”

”Then what do you say if we stop and see the show?”

”Good idea!”

”I don’t care how many of you go to the show; but, mark me, it will cost you fifty cents a head, and at the first sign of disturbance you’ll see the biggest bunch of trouble headed your way!”

”It’s all right, Mr. Sparling. We admit we’ve been done.”

And that was the end of it. Mr. Sparling’s lawyer visited the town where the disturbance had occurred on the previous day, and at his client’s direction made a settlement that should have been wholly satisfactory to the injured parties. Ordinarily the showman would not have settled the case, in view of the fact that neither he nor any of his employees was directly responsible for the series of disasters. He did it almost wholly on account of Phil Forrest, who had asked him to.

”Well, young man, I’ve paid the bills,” announced Mr. Sparling that afternoon before the evening performance.

”Thank you,” glowed Phil.

"Stop that! If there's any thanks in it, they're coming to you. Between you and the elephant we'll have another turn-away today. You have already put a good bit of money in my pocket, and I'm not forgetting it. I have made definite arrangements for you and your chum to have a berth in a closed wagon after this. You will be good enough to offer no objections this time. What I say goes."

"I hope I did not do anything wrong in taking Emperor away. I'm afraid my conscience has troubled me ever since. But I didn't intend to do anything wrong or to cause any further damage than already had been done."

"You did perfectly right, Forrest. That was a stroke of genius. As for damage, I tell you I have settled all of that. One of these days you come in when I'm not busy and we'll talk about next season. I want you to stay with me."

Phil left his employer, the lad's face flushed and his eyes sparkling. Altogether, he was a very happy boy. The only real cloud that had darkened his horizon was that anyone should feel such an enmity toward him as to desire to take his life; or, at least, to cause him so serious an injury as to put an end to the career that now seemed so promising.

"I know why, of course," mused the lad. "It was jealousy. I am more sure than ever as to the identity of the man who did it. When I get a good opportunity I am going to face him with it. I'm not afraid of the man. As it is, he might try it again; but if he understands that I know he will not dare try it, fearing I may have told someone else."

Having come to this wise conclusion, Phil proceeded to the big top, where he and Teddy Tucker were to take their afternoon practice on the flying rings, pausing on the way to pass a handful of peanuts to Emperor, who was again in his place, and give the elephant's trainer a happy nod.

"I've noticed of late that Signor Navaro acts rather grouchy over you boys working on his apparatus. You want to look out for these foreigners. Some of them are revengeful," cautioned Mr. Miaco.

Signor Navaro was the leading performer in the flying-rings act. With him was his young son, Rodney Palmer and a young girl performer, whose father was a clown in the show.

Phil shot a sharp glance at Mr. Miaco, then dropped his eyes.

"I guess nobody would be jealous of me," laughed the lad. "I'm

only a beginner, and a clumsy one at that. All I can do is to ride an elephant and fall off, nearly killing myself.”

”Nevertheless, you take my advice.”

”I will, thank you.”

The boys began their work after putting on their working clothes, consisting of old silk undershirts and linen trunks. This left them free for the full play of their muscles, which, by this time, were of exceptionally fine quality. Not big and bunched, but like thin bands of pliable steel. Both Phil and Teddy appeared to have grown half a head taller since they joined out with the circus.

”Put a little more finish in that cutoff movement,” directed their instructor. ”The way you do it, Teddy, you remind me of a man trying to kick out a window. There, that’s better.”

And so it went on. Days came and went and the steady practice of the two circus boys continued, but if Mr. Sparling knew what they were doing he made no reference to it. He probably did know, for little went on in the Sparling Combined Shows that he was not aware of.

Nothing out of the routine occurred, until, late in the season, they pitched their tents in Canton, Ohio, when something happened that brought to a climax the certainty of the careers of the circus boys.

All day long the clouds had been threatening. But, though keen eyes were watching the scudding clouds, no apprehension was felt, as it was believed to be but a passing thunderstorm that was coming up.

The storm did not break until late in the afternoon when the show was more than half over. Phil had made his grand entry on Emperor, and Teddy had nearly sent the spectators into hysterics by his funny antics on the back of Jumbo, the educated mule.

All at once the circus men glanced aloft as the shrill whistle of the boss canvasman trilled somewhere outside the big top. The audience, if they heard, gave no heed. They were too much interested in the show.

To the showmen the whistle meant that the emergency gang was being summoned in haste to stake down emergency ropes to protect the tent from a windstorm that was coming up.

Phil took a quick survey of the upper part of the tent. Two acts

were just beginning up there. A trapeze act was on, and the four performers were swinging out on the flying rings.

Both sets of performers were in rather perilous positions were the wind to blow very hard, as Phil well understood. He stepped off until he found a quarter pole at his back against which he leaned that he might watch the better the lofty performers.

All at once there was a blast against the big top that sounded as if a great blow had been delivered. The audience half rose. The tent shook from end to end.

"Sit down!" bellowed the ringmaster. "It's only a puff of wind."

Before the words were out of his mouth a piercing scream roused the audience almost to the verge of panic.

Phil, whose attention had been drawn to the people for the moment, shot a swift glance up into the somber haze of the peak of the big top.

Something had happened. But what?

"They're falling!" he gasped.

The blow had loosened nearly every bit of the aerial apparatus under the circus tent.

"There go the trapeze performers!"

Down they came, landing with a whack in the net with their apparatus tumbling after them. But they were out of the net in a twinkling, none the worse for their accident. Almost at the same moment there were other screams.

"There go the rings!"

There was no net under the flying ring performers. Two of them shot toward the ground. When they struck, one was on top of the other. The man at the bottom was Signor Navaro, his son having fallen prone across him. The two other performers in the act had grabbed a rope and saved themselves.

Men picked the two fallen performers up hastily and bore them to the dressing tent, where Phil hastened the moment he was sure that all danger of a panic had passed. The gust of wind had driven the clouds away and the sun flashed out brilliantly.

A moment later the performance was going on with a rush, the band playing a lively tune.

Phil, when he reached the dressing tent, learned that Signor Navaro was seriously hurt, though his son was suffering merely from shock. The father had sustained several broken bones.

Phil approached the injured performer and leaned over him. The man was conscious.

"I'm sorry, very sorry, sir," breathed the boy sympathetically.

"You needn't be. You'll get what you want," murmured the circus man.

"I don't understand," wondered Phil.

"You'll get my act."

"Is that what you think I have been working for?"

Signor Navaro nodded.

"You are mistaken. Of course, if you are not able to perform any more this season I shall try to get it, but when you are able to go to work I shall give it up willingly, even if I succeed in getting it during that time. Is that why you played that trick on me?" demanded the lad.

"You know?" questioned Signor Navaro, with a start.

Phil gave a slight nod.

"Why did you put the file in my trunk—the file you cut the wire with?"

"I thought I dropped it in my own trunk. Somebody surprised me and I was afraid they would catch me with it in my hand and suspect."

"That's what I thought."

"You are sharp. And you told no one?"

"No. But I had made up my mind to tell you. I didn't think it would have to be this way, though. I'm sorry it is."

"Well, I have my punishment. It served me right. I was crazed with jealousy. I—how is the boy?"

"Not badly hurt, I believe. He will be all right in a few days, and I hope you will be able to join out in a short time."

Signor Navaro extended a feeble hand, which Phil pressed softly.

"Forgive me, boy. Will you?"

"Yes," whispered Phil.

"And you will tell no—"

"There is nothing to tell, Signor Navaro. If there is anything I can do for you, tell me, and I shall have great happiness in doing it," breathed the lad.

A final grip of the hands of the boy and the injured performer followed, after which Phil Forrest stepped back to make way for the surgeon, who had hurried to a wagon to fetch his case.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

"You see, an accident always casts a cloud over a show and makes the performers uncertain," said Mr. Miaco that night as he and Phil were watching the performance from the end of the band platform.

"I should think it would," mused the boy.

Soon after that Phil went to his wagon and turned in, his mind still on Signor Navaro, who had been taken to a hospital, where he was destined to remain for many weeks.

"I guess it doesn't pay, in the long run, to be dishonorable," mused the lad as he was dropping off to sleep.

The next morning Phil was up bright and early, very much refreshed after a good night's rest between his blankets in the comfortable sleeping wagon. Teddy, however, declared that he didn't like it. He said he preferred to sleep on a pile of canvas in the open air, even if he did get wet once in a while.

Later in the morning, after Mr. Sparling had had time to dispose of his usual rush of morning business, which consisted of hearing reports from his heads of departments, and giving his orders for the day, Phil sought out his employer in the little dog tent.

"I'm very sorry about the accident, Mr. Sparling," greeted Phil.

"Yes; it ties up one act. It will be some days before I can get another team in to take it up, and here we are just beginning to play the big towns. I have been trying to figure out if there was not someone in the show who could double in that act and get away with it," mused the showman. "How'd you sleep?"

"Fine. Is there no one you can think of who could fill the bill, Mr. Sparling?"

"No; that's the rub. You know of anyone?"

"How about myself."

"What?"

Mr. Sparling surveyed the lad in surprised inquiry.

"I think I can make a pretty fair showing on the rings. Of course, if Signor Navaro gets well and comes back, I shall be glad to give the act back to him. I know something about the flying rings."

"Young man, is there anything in this show that you can't do?" demanded Mr. Sparling, with an attempt at sternness.

"A great many things, sir. Then, again, there are some others that I have confidence enough in myself to believe I can do. You see, I have been practicing on the rings ever since I joined out."

"But you are only one. We shall need two performers," objected the owner.

"Teddy Tucker has been working with me. He is fully as good on the flying rings as I am, if not better."

"H-m-m-m!" mused the showman. "Come over to the big top and let's see what you really can do," he said, starting up.

Phil ran in search of Teddy and in a few minutes the two boys appeared in the arena, ready for the rehearsal.

Mr. Miaco, who had been called on and informed of the news, accompanied them. It was he who hauled the boys up to the rings far up toward the top of the tent.

"Get a net under there! We don't want to lose any more performers this season," the clown commanded.

After some little delay the net was spread and the showman motioned for the performance to proceed, walking over and taking his seat on the boards so that he might watch the performance from the viewpoint of the audience.

With the utmost confidence the boys went through the act without a slip. They did everything that Signor Navaro had done in his performance, adding some clever feats of their own that had been devised with the help of Mr. Miaco. Mr. Sparling looked on with twinkling eyes and frequent nods of approval.

"Fine! Fine! One of the best flying-ring acts I ever saw," he shouted, when finally the lads rounded out their act by a series of rapid evolutions commonly known as "skinning the cat." Even in this their act was attended with variations.

The boys concluded by a graceful drop into the net, from which they bounded into the air, swung themselves to the ground, each throwing a kiss to the grinning manager.

A number of performers who had been a witness to the performance clapped their hands and shouted "bravo!"

Mr. Sparling called the lads to him.

"The act is yours," he said. "It is better than Navaro's. Each of you will draw twenty five dollars a week for the rest of the season," he announced to the proud circus boys, who thereupon ran to the dressing tent to take a quick bath and get into their costumes ready for the parade.

"See to it that they have the net spread, Mr. Ducro," he directed. "Never permit them to perform without it."

That afternoon the boys made their first appearance in the flying-ring exhibition, and their act really proved a sensation. Mr. Sparling, who was observing it from the side, kept his head bobbing with nods of approval and muttered comments.

After the show Phil suggested that thereafter Teddy be allowed to use a clown makeup, because his funny antics in the air were more fitted to the character of a clown than to that of a finished performer.

To this the owner readily agreed, and that night they tried it with tremendous success.

The days that followed were bright ones for the circus boys. Each day seemed an improvement over the previous one. The season drew

rapidly to a close and they looked forward to the day with keen regret.

One day Mr. Sparling summoned them to his tent.

"Are you boys ready to sign up for next season?" he asked.

"I should like to," answered Phil.

"This will be a railroad show next season, the third largest show on the road, and I want you both."

"Thank you; I shall join gladly."

"So will I," chorused Teddy.

"Your salaries will be fifty dollars a week next season. And if you wish a vaudeville engagement for the winter I think I shall be able to get one for you."

"We are going to school, Mr. Sparling. Teddy and I will be hard at work over our books next week. But we are going to keep up our practice all winter and perhaps we may have some new acts to surprise you with in the spring," laughed Phil, his face aglow with happiness.

A week later found the lads back in Edmeston, bronzed, healthy, manly and admired by all who saw them. Phil had nearly four hundred dollars in the bank, while Teddy had about one hundred less.

Phil's first duty after greeting Mrs. Cahill was to call on his uncle, who begrudgingly allowed his nephew to shake hands with him. Next day the circus boys dropped into their old routine life and applied themselves to their studies, at the same time looking forward to the day when the grass should grow green again and the little red wagons roll out for their summer journeyings.

Here we will leave them. But Phil and his companion will be heard from again in a following volume, to be published immediately, entitled, "THE CIRCUS BOYS ACROSS THE CONTINENT; Or, Winning New Laurels on the Tanbark." In this volume their thrilling adventures under the billowing canvas are to be continued, leading them on to greater triumphs and successes.