

Percy B. St. John



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Billy, the Box Boy. Or, Bossing A Bad Show.

By
P. T. Raymond (Percy B. St. John).

Author of »Tom, the Tumbler,« »Seven Boy Slaves,« »Young Texas Jack,« »Headstrong Harry,« etc., etc.



CHAPTER I. ON THE ROAD.



Get ahead, boys! Get ahead! going to get caught in the rain as sure as fate!«

»Don' kear a continental fer mah part!« cried Professor Jeronomus, the native Soudanese elephant tender. »It will give Sandy a good washing, and that's what he needs.«

»Johnson speaks for himself!" exclaimed Miss Muselle Malognio, the great Irish ballad singer, putting her head out of the old carryall and taking a look at the clouds. »As for us ladies, we don't want to get wet; not for a cent. You Tom O'Grady, pipe up and give us something to go by. Sure when the pipes make music the horses trot right along.«

»Music!« cried Wilfred Wilkington, »the only Wilkington,« the far-famed bareback rider. »Since when was any music extracted from the bagpipe? Billy Hunt, you are supposed to be bossing this bad show. I appeal to you to spare us another dose of that horrible din.«

Billy was the boy who had urged haste, and, as he rode well in advance, probably he did not hear.

At all events he did not interfere, and Tom O'Grady started his old bagpipe a-going all right.

Mercy, what a squeaking and wheezing it made!

The rocks and trees echoed back the sound, forming a sort of under chorus, which made it a little more inharmonious than it otherwise would have been.

No wonder the twenty odd horses trotted on more briskly, and Billy Hunt, although he hated the bagpipe, especially when Tom put on the »droner,« which made its melancholy shriek still more dismal, could not but acknowledge that it did help to get the procession along on the road to Skadonk Centre, and that he most wanted just then.

It was a strange procession, too.

Ever since it left Egg Hill, where the last stand had been made, all eyes had been turned upon it as it passed along the lonely country road.

As the people who made it up are the same as are going to help make up our story, we may as well stop to describe them now before the storm overtakes them, for some of them will not bear being rained upon—this is particularly true of the

ladies in the old carryall—for, of course, paint will wash off the face unless you use oil colors, which ladies seldom do.

Here we go—the description, we mean, but the procession is going on, too, making rattling good time along the dusty road, with woods on one side and cabbages and corn on the other, and an old red farmhouse on ahead at the top of the hill.

First came Billy Hunt, the box boy and treasurer of Patricio's & Whiffalini's Greatest Show in the World.

Mr. Whiffles, the manager, is not with him—he has gone to New York on business to meet »Don Patricio« the owner—his last name was said to be Reilly, and there are those in the show who declare that his first name should be spelled with a P and an A and a D another D and a Y.

Billy rode a white mare, and right behind him came Sam Mendal, the »Human Ostrich,« riding on a black one.

Sam came from somewhere over on the East Side of New York, and was commonly supposed to breakfast on broken crockery, dine on nails and carpet tacks, and to swallow a few tumblers for tea.

Then came the Signor La Fittee, the famous »fire eater,« who ought to have gone into partnership with Sam Mendal so as to cook his meals.

The Signor was a quiet fellow, who was seldom seen with anything but a smile on his face, except when somebody shortened up his name to Lafferty.

He rode beside his friend, the worldrenowned Dannio De la Nee, the ballad singer, with whom he always managed to raise a row, when in the evening the »can« was rushing, by calling him Danny Delany; but at all other times they were fast friends, and were so well made up to resemble distinguished foreigners that it was hard to believe that both were born in »Irishtown,« where the big gas house casts long shadows upon the sidewalk on a hot July day.

Play away, Tom! Play away, old boy, for here comes the most important personage in the show!

That is »Sandy,« not a Scot, nor yet a descendant of the »Kings of Kerry,« but an African by birth, walking on four legs, led by Professor Jeronomus, alias Johnson, another African who walks on two.

Sandy was the elephant, and Sandy could dance, drink beer, and do other wonderful things.

Besides, Sandy was the only animal, outsides of the horses and dogs, which belonged to the »Greatest Show in the World,« although the posters and small bills promised a@ lion, a tiger, a hippopotamus and five snakes.

Behind Sandy came the old carryall, driven by Jerry Rickers, the clown, carrying Miss Lucette Langini, Miss Muselle Malognio, who had red hair, and whose real name was Mamie Maloney, and Mrs. Johnson, colored, laundress, caretaker, cook and general helper, who was married to Professor Jeronomus, Sandy's sable guardian from the Soudan.

Behind the carryall was the tent wagon, and then came the spare horses, and then the trunks.

This was the procession.

The »Greatest Show in the World« on the road.

Sometimes it traveled by rail, often, and this was one of the times it didn't.

Skadonk was less than five miles distant, and the storm was right upon them, which worried Billy, who had been put in charge by Manager Whiffles before he left for town.

»Faster! Faster!« he shout, as the thunder began to growl.

Tom O'Grady—he rode in an Irish jaunting car behind the tent wagon, although we forgot to mention it—thought the order was meant for him, and began piping away for all he was worth, while the drivers urged the tired horses along the dusty road.

Presently it began to rain.

It was nothing but a summer shower, but while it lasted the water fell right lively, and it kept it up until the show was within a mile of Skadonk.

It was getting late, too.

There would be hardly time to get the tent up and start the show if oo didn't hurry.

Billy was again urging them on, when they came near a farmhouse which stood by the roadside.

Billy heard the cries first, for he was in the lead.

»Oh! Don't beat me! Don't beat me! Oh! Oh! Oh!«

Spat! Spat! Spat!

Some one was using the strap lively within the farmhouse, the door of which stood wide open, for the rain was coming the other way.

All at once a pretty little girl of nine or ten came running cut into the road.

She was but half clothed, and the blood was all over her neck and shoulders.

»Oh! Oh! Oh! Save me from her! Don't let her get me!« she screamed. »She will kill me! Yes, she will!«

A slatternly woman, with her hair flying and a long strap in her hand, came running after her, calling to the child to come back and vowing vengeance if she

refused.

But the child had no notion of going back.

Darting through the open gate, she was almost under the feet of Billy's horse, when a fearful flash of lightning startled all.

It descended upon a tree, and from thence flew to the roof of the farmhouse, striking the chimney, and setting fire to the shingles, in spite of the fact that they were drenched by the rain.

The fall of the shattered limb, the rattle of the bricks upon the roof, followed instantly by a deafening clap of thunder, seemed to daze the irate virago who was pursuing the little girl.

»Oh! The house has been struck by lightning!« she screamed, and in through the door she went rushing, apparently forgetting all about the child.

»Oh, Billy! Oh, look out!« screamed Muselle Malognio, for the little girl, worked up to that pitch of excitement where something had to give, dropped in the road directly in front of the box boy's horse in a dead faint.

CHAPTER II.

A FINE RECEPTION AT SKADONK.

A moment more and Billy would have run the little one down.

He reined in the mare just as the startled beast was about to plant its forefeet upon the child.

Billy was on the ground in a minute, and had the little one in his arms.

»Here, you take care of her, Muselle,« he cried. »Don't let that old hag get her. Hide her under your skirts, girls, and we will inquire into this later. We have got to help put out the fire, I suppose.«

This, however, did not seem to be necessary, for two men came running from the direction of the barn with a ladder and a bucket.

Neither one was needed. doing the work.

No one inquired for the child, or seemed to show the slightest interest in her.

The woman appeared to have forgotten all about her, in fact.

She was leaning out of the window calling to the men that the fire had broken out inside.

»Move on, Billy!« cried Dannio De la Nee. »Sure well settle with dem later. It's meself that'll stand for the little girl not going back at all, unless she says the wurrud.«

Others called out similar

Billy needed no urging.

He put spurs to the mare, and the procession moved on into Skadonk.

»Oh, the pretty little dear, she has come to herself!« cried Muselle Malognio, putting the child in her lap as soon as they were out of sight of the house. »What's your name, little one? Don't be afraid.«

The girl's name was Mamie Brown, it appeared.

»She was not the daughter of the woman with the strap, who owned to the name of Van Dunk.

Then it was ever so many questions, and just as many answers, and the ladies of the »Greatest Show in the World« learned that Mamie was an orphan bound over to Mrs. Van Dunk by the town authorities, who had kept her in the poorhouse since before the time she could remember.

When asked if she wanted to go back, the child declared in the most emphatic manner that she didn't, and at last she cried herself to sleep with Muselle's arm around her.

»She's a flower washed into me arms by the storm!« declared Miss Malognio, »and it's meself that will keep her from falling into the clutches of that old hag!«

Miss Malognio was a singer, and her forte was the Irish ballad, which she did to perfection, and she could do a good bit of talking, too, when she chose.

Billy gave the matter little thought.

He had other serious things to think about.

He was not only the ticket taker and treasurer, with not a cent in his possession, having turned the cash all over to Whiffles the night before, but he had a secret fear in his heart which made him very uncomfortable.

It was now three weeks sin since. »Don Patricio« had been seen.

Manager Whiffles had started off to look for him, leaving Billy in charge, and it was the secret fear of the box boy that he would never be seen again.

Meanwhile, it was only these poor little South Jersey towns that the »Greatest Show in the World« had to depend upon, because they had no money to get to the big ones.

»Billy is to be the boss till I come back again,« was the last thing Manager Whiffles said when he departed, but now Billy was wondering how long he would be able to hold down his job.

Fact was, the show was a very bad one, and its fame (?) was heralded ahead of it from town to town.

As for the rest, the only thing of real value belonging to it outside of the horses was Sandy, the little elephant, and Billy looked to see some sheriff or constable appear with a writ of attachment at any moment, and »swipe« poor Sandy, which, of course, would be the finish of the »Greatest Show.«

But enough of description.

The show is about to enter the village of Skadonk.

»Pipe up! Pipe up!« cried Billy, and Tom O'Grady worked his mouth and his arm for all they were worth, first putting himself at the head of the procession, which was just about to start down Main street.

It had quit raining now; in fact, it had cleared off altogether, and there was nothing to hinder the procession from coming out full strength.

It had stopped back in the woods, where Mr. Johnson retiring, soon reappeared attired as the great elephant tamer of the Soudan, and with feathers stuck in his wool, a dirty white oriental robe, and a gilded staff, mounted Sandy's neck, looking more like the king of the cannibal islands than a respectable member of a colored Baptist congregation, as he was.

It was the same with Signor La Fittée and the great De la Née, to say nothing of the ladies in the old carryall.

All managing to get into gorgeous costumes with stars and spangles somehow, the ladies mounted horses, also, and the »Greatest Show in the World« moved solemnly down Main street to the music of the Highland pipes, or the Irish pipes, or whatever kind of pipes they might have been, and dismal their groanings and wild shrieks, which represented a class of music neither understood nor appreciated in this out-of-the-way Jersey town.

Where were the twenty elephants, the lions and the tigers, and the hippopotamus depicted on the bills, which, by the way, Paddy Reilly—beg pardon, we mean »Don Patricio«—had purchased second hand from a »busted« greatest show, only altering the name on top.

Where were the glided chariots—ha, ha! There was the old carryall, to be sure!

Where was the brass band of forty pieces supposed to march at head of the »grand street parade,« so glowingly described in the small bills?

Where was—but where was any of it—that's what the good people of Skadonk wanted to know, as they came flocking out of houses and stores to see the procession pass.

The men laughed and passed remarks.

The ladies turned back into their doors in disgust.

»Fake! Fake!« cried the ubiquitous small boy, who was out in force, and then as Billy, who held a dirty example of Old Glory aloft as he guided the white mare down the street, came opposite the town hall and engine house a shower of rotten eggs and aged vegetables went whizzing about the heads of the wretched company.

»Fake! Fake!« was yelled on all sides. »Don't stop in Skadonk! Get on with your bad show!«

CHAPTER III.

BOOMING BUSINESS IN SKADONK.

»Sure an' it was a great call down, Billy,« remarked Dannio La Fittee, the balladist, once the Fair Grounds were reached and the mob of small bore left behind. »That makes three times within week we've had the eggs. Ah! bad luck to the byes! They have me velvet coat all yaller. Didn't I set up half last night trying to scrape the last dose off?«

La Fittee was wrathful, and so was his chum, De la Nee, and so, in fact, was every one else in the company, but Billy would not stand for such talk as this.

»Get to work, boys!« he cried. »What's the use crying over what can't be helped? What we want is dough—the real thing. We are billed here, and the grounds are paid for, so we are going to make a stand or miss.«

»Hooray. for Billy! He's always on the Back him up, boys!. If only one dollar to come out of this town that dollar we want. Pitch in!«

Everybody liked Billy, and although he was only eighteen years old, or thereabouts, he had not the least difficulty in making the company do as he wished.

It wasn't the first time Billy had been left in charge of this same bad show.

They knew that the boy was straight; that he was fairly disposed toward each one.

Besides this, Billy was always cheerful, and when things were at their worst that was the time he laughed the heartiest.

In short, Billy, the box boy, was a favorite all around.

Once inside the fair grounds there was no further disturbance.

Orders were to make a second round of the town, but Billy sat down on that.

Once was quite enough, he declared, and the others thought so, too.

So they started right in for business.

The big tent was put up—actually it was anything but big, and old and leaky as well.

The ring was made, and the smaller tent for the horses put in place.

Meanwhile, all the company, bossed by Billy, got up the bleachers, while the canvas men were at work, and by six o'clock everything was ready for the show.

Mrs. Johnson had been at work, too, and had cooked supper on the old stove.

All hands sat down at the rough table made of boards stretched between two horses.

This was the way the company always lived.

There were no hotel bills for the members of the »Greatest Show in the World« to pay.

Little Mamie Brown sat between Muselle and Lucette Langini.

The child was shy, and said but little, but seemed thoroughly contented, for the ladies had dressed her in fine clothes, which just fitted. They were part of the wardrobe belonging to a child bareback rider who had lately left the show.

At half past six everything was cleared away, and at seven the Fair Ground gate was thrown open, for the show was billed to begin at half-past.

The naphtha torches were all blazing and Tom O'Grady was piping away for dear life, while Wilfred Wilkington, who »doubled« on the »barking act,« was calling out the beauties of the show for the benefit of three small boys, two little girls, a tramp and a blind man.

Such was the dense crowd which came flocking in through the gates of the Skadonk Fair Grounds to avoid rush for seats.

Billy, in the box office, looked out feeling rather dismal, it must be owned.

He ran over his bunch of tickets with his fingers, and rattled the cents in his cash box, and tried to make himself believe that business would yet come.

»Here you are, ladies and gentlemen! Greatest show that was ever exhibited on the face of the yerth!« bawled the barker. »Walk right up and secure your seats while there's time. Come in and see the wonderful trained elephant! Let me call your attention to Signor La Fittee the fire eater! As you see him depicted here upon the canvas calmly lunching off the devouring element, so you will see him inside the tent when the show is on. Walk right up, ladies and gentlemen, Step right in and get your money's worth. No fake here! Come and see the wonderful human ostrich who dines on broken glass and tenpenny nails daily, thereby emulating in his digestive powers that wonderful bird which courses its way over the South African plains-yes sir. Plenty of seats unsold. Admission to all twenty-five cents and no reserve. Walk right up to the box office and secure the good places while there is yet time.«

It was a tall, cadaverous looking man with a red nose and a broad-brimmed hat, who had stopped to question the barker.

He shifted the faded cotton umbrella under the other arm, and presented himself to Billy, who for a moment thought that his first quarter had actually come.

But no! There was disappointment in the first word.

»Ah! Good evening, young man. I am a minister of the Gospel,« began the stranger. »Am I to understand that this is a strictly moral Show?«

»Oh, yes, Sir,« replied poor Billy; entirely so.«

»Ahem! That remains to be proved,« coughed the stranger. I am the Reverend Mr. Markly, in the interest of the morals of Skadonk. I desire to visit this show, and if it proves as you say I shall certainly recommend it. The clergy, presume, have entrance free?«

»Oh certainly, sir,« replied Billy, handing out the ticket with the best graces possible. »Look out you don't get lost in the shuffle inside there.«

The Reverend Mr. Markly accepted the ticket with a scowl.

»Young Man, your remarks savor of levity, and levity at all times is unseemly,« he said. »Why should I get lost in the shuffle, as you call it? As yet I have seen no one enter this sink of iniquity—I refer to the tent.«

»Boys, come here!« cried Billy. »You girls come, too.«

There were eight on hand now, not counting the blind man, who came hobbling forward with his cane.

»Here you are! Free tickets all around!« cried Billy, passing over the pasteboards. »In with you! You, too, Mister,« to the blind man; »there, now, sir, you see the shuffle. They won't hurt you—you not be afraid to go in.«

The parson went into the tent without further parley, and as the barker kept on barking a merry party of half a dozen boys and girls came up.

These paid their quarters, poured into the tent.

Business had now fairly begun.

Quite a number followed.

At last came a tall, slab-sided individual, accompanied by a man with a huge gilt badge.

»Where's the boss of this show?« demanded the latter. »Where is he? I want to put him under arrest!

CHAPTER IV.

A BAD BEGINNING.

Billy Hunt's heart dropped away down into his boots, so to speak.

Still he »came up to the scratch", like a man.

»I'm the boss of the show«, he said. »What is this for? The grounds are all paid for. I--«

»Hold!« said the »Rube.« »This is not a question of grounds or ground rent. It is a question of kidnapping. My name is Van Dunk. As this mob of ruffians passed my place this afternoon a child was missing, a little girl, a child of my wife's adoption. We have not seen her since, and it is my belief that she was stolen by some of your crew.«

»Yes,« said the constable, »that's the idea, and I'm here to arrest the boss!«

»Stand aside, please!« said Billy. »There are those behind you who want tickets. Pass up your money, gentlemen! I'm in the box for business. Never mind these people at all.«

There were several persons gathered behind the constable waiting to buy tickets.

Billy served them all in spite of the constable's loud protests.

They were young fellows and their girls, and they seemed to take the noise the constable made as a good joke.

»That's right!. Pull 'em all in Carker!« they cried. »They are nothing but a lot of fakirs, anyhow! Run 'em into the lock-up and we'll run the show!«

Then constable Carker turned on the boys, of course.

A war of words was the result.

The constable called one of the young fellows »out of his name«—very much so!

Result a tight fist against the constable's nose.

Result of that: a free fight for five minutes.

After result: somebody pulled Van Dunk's goatee, and he joined in the fight.

Side issue: Wilfred Wilkington pitched into both sides, and two canvas men, running out of the tent, also took a hand in.

Billy pocketed the cash and the tickets, and tried to get out of the box office, which was a portable affair, and made so that it could shut up.

Shut up it did, too, when someone fell against it and tipped it over with Billy inside.

Worse still, the naphtha torch standing near was knocked over, and the box office caught fire.

Lively times followed.

Men shouted and women screamed.

Billy was dragged out, and the fire stamped out, and finally order came out of chaos, and the constable and »Rube« Van Dunk were ready to start in over again.

The box was set up with a hole burned in one side.

The naphtha torch was relighted, and after the young fellows got their tickets the constable and Van Dunk tackled Billy again.

There must be no more nonsense about this business,« declared the farmer. »I want that child.«

Billy had made up his mind just what to do while the scrimmage was going on.

»I know nothing about it, and have nothing to do with it,« he declared. »I saw a woman beating a little girl with a strap until she sank down in the road insensible. Then the house was struck by lightning, and I turned away to look at that. What became of the child I can't say.«

»How's that, Van Dunk?« asked the constable. »Did your woman take the strap to Mamie? She's such a gentle little thing that I shouldn't hardly think it was necessary. Say, neighbor, this won't do.«

»I demand the child! I demand the child!« roared Van Dunk.

For a few moments it looked as though the fight was going to begin again, and this time between the constable and his client.

Quite a number of people were coming up to the box office, and Billy was busy serving them.

He found means to call up one of the canvas men, however, and dispatched him to the »green room« in the back part of the tent, to give the ladies warning about the little girl.

»Come!« cried the constable at last. »I must do my duty. You will have to come out of that box, young man!«

»But I won't,« said Billy stubbornly. »I've got to attend to my business here. Go in and find the child if you-can. The tent is all open. There's no one to interfere.«

The constable concluded that this would be a good scheme.

Farmer Van Dunk agreed to the proposition.

They went back into the tent, and left Billy to go on with his work.

But although freed from his tormentors for the moment, Billy felt decidedly nervous.

He had no control over the ladies of the company in whatever concerned their private affairs.

If they chose to keep the little one with them he saw no way to prevent it.

Mamie herself had told them a piteous tale of ill-treatment, and begged hard to be allowed to stay with her new friends.

»If they won't give her up I can't help it,« thought Billy, as he turned to wait on red face and an extra tall hat, whose eyes came but a little way above the level of the box.

»Ha! Good evening! Good evening!« cried the man, in a shrill, high-pitched voice. »I presume you know who I am?«

»Here's another free ticket, by gracious!« thought Billy. »Well, I must have pilled in twenty-five dollars by this time, so I can afford a deadhead or two.«

»Really, I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance, sir,« he replied; »but I shall be glad to know you. Might I ask —«

»My name?« broke in the little man. »Yes, you may ask it, I'm Pumply, Justice of the Peace and Mayor of this town!«

He drew himself up proudly, and stood back as if expecting to see Billy drop dead in the box.

»Oh, that's all right,« said Billy. »Happy to pass you in, Judge. Here's a ticket. It will give you the best reserved seat in the house.«

Billy jumped the judge in on the little man as a flyer.

He could not have hit it better if he wanted to get on the blind side of the local magistrate.

Squire Pumply accepted the free ticket as though it was his right.

He did not even say thank you, but instead asked for passes for some ladies and gentlemen behind him, six all told.

Billy kept a smiling face, and dealt out tickets to these four new deadheads, and all went into the tent.

»I've made myself solid there,« thought Billy. »If I'm arrested I suppose I shall be brought before Squire Pumply. It's well enough to be prepared.«

The audience was about, all in now.

A few stragglers came to the box office in the next ten minutes, and then Billy turned his post over to the canvas man and went inside, for it was after half-past seven, and time to begin the show.

He made his way to the back of the tent to the »green room,* where he found every one highly excited.

The constable and the hayseed had been there threatening everybody and searching everywhere, but they hadn't found the child.

»And they'll never get the little dear!« cried Muselle Malognio. »I'll fight for her to the last. Billy, I'll tell you how I fooled them. I-«

»No, don't tell me! I don't want to know,« broke in Billy. »There's going to be more trouble about this, and I think the child ought to be given up.«

»To be beaten to death!« screamed Muselle. .»You had ought to see her back!«

»To be burned to death with red-hot pokers!« cried Lucette. »You ought to see her feet! Oh, it's wicked! I tell you that woman is a fiend.«

»Well, I've nothing to do with it, only they tried to arrest me for kidnapping,« said Billy. »Time is up! Start her a-going. We want to get through here and be on the move before midnight.«

This was the signal.

Wilfred Wilkington and his fellow riders of both sexes, who were already in costume, sprang upon their horses und rode out into the ring.

It was high time, for the boys were clapping and stamping their feet.

»How much in the house?« asked Jerry Rickers, the clown.

»More than thirty dollars,« replied Billy.

»Good enough! That's a better than I expected. It will get us something to eat, anyhow, and that's about all we can look for this trip.«

»Hurry up, Jerry, and get in,« said Billy. »I have my doubts about how the procession is going to take.«

He need not have had.

It was already settled.

Loud hisses could be heard outside in the tent.

Then a voice. called to the ring master:

»Run 'em off! Run 'em off! They're no good! Let's begin the show!«

CHAPTER V.

WORSE AND WORSE.

»Lay outside there, Jerry!« cried Billy. »Don't lose a minute. Try your best to make them laugh!«

This was easier said than done, for Jerry's jokes were old and stale, and often the audience did not take kindly to them.

On this occasion the clown »humped himself,« as he afterward expressed it, and somehow or other did succeed in getting the audience laughing.

Billy was watching it all from behind the canvas.

»There's going to be trouble,« he remarked to Wilfred Wilkington. »I'm sure there's going to be trouble before we are through.«

»What makes you think so, Billy?« asked the bareback rider. »Because they hissed the procession is no sign. Why, it's almost always hissed, and of course it's rank, anyhow. Wait till I do my act—that will settle everything all right.«

Billy had his doubts. Wilkington was a pretty good rider when he was entirely sober, but in some way or other he had managed to get hold of whiskey.

His breath had a pretty rank odor, he certainly was not sober now.

But Billy was only a boy, while Wilkington was an old circus man. To tell him or even ask him—not to go into the ring would be a sure way of raising a terrible row.

Jerry Rickers owned an old trick mule, which had long seen its best days, but just the same he managed to keep the audience in good humor with it ten minutes longer, Tom O'Grady piping away to furnish music.

»Time!« called Billy, waving his hand to Wilkington, who stood by his horse, and then he struck the bell as a signal to Tom to shut off the pipes and Jerry to send back the mule.

Then the great and only Wilkington went dashing out into the ring, dressed in a dirty spangled suit much the worse for wear.

Three times he made ie circuit of the ring standing on his horse's bare back.

Billy watched anxiously.

The man had a dozen postures, but he took none of them. Instead he just held on to the reins for dear life, and when Billy peeped out he saw him wabbling from side to side.

The clown was jumping about cracking jokes, and trying to do his best.

Billy poked his head out, and beckoned to Mr. Ryan, the ring master.

»Get him out of it! Get him out of it, for goodness sake!« he whispered, as the man drew near.

»Can't!« answered Ryan. »Great Scott, Billy, he's full again! I had no idea!«

»I know it,« said Billy. »It's terrible. What should we do? Ah, I thought so! There it goes!«

»Hi-s-s-s! . His-s-s!«

It was the fatal sound.

It unnerved Wilkington, of course.

He made a mad effort to stand on one leg and whirl around on the horse's back

Boisterous laughter, wild shouts, and furious hissing.

That was the result.

Poor Wilkington was down in the sawdust, and the horse trotted calmly out of the ring, as much as to say that he had enough of it if his master had not.

Billy jumped outside, and with the help of Mr. Rickers dragged Wilkington out of the ring.

Then Billy thought it necessary to address the audience.

»Ladies and gentlemen, I trust you will pardon this little break,« he said. »It is a well-known fact that accidents will happen even in the best regulated families, and a show is no exception to the rule.«

»Dry up!« somebody shouted.

»Go on with your old show!« another yelled.

There were other remarks made.

Billy, who felt that he was decidedly fortunate in not having a dose of rotten eggs, stood waiting for the silence, when the Reverend Mr. Markly rose to the occasion, or, in other words, felt it necessary to get up in his seat and begin a harangue.

»Young man,« he called out, »after the disgusting exhibition of inebriety which we have been called upon to witness, I desire some assurance that remainder of this performance will be on moral grounds. I desire to see the manager of this show. Let him—er—let him show himself. Let him-er-that is to say-er-let him say something to restore confidence, to-er-to -«

»Oh, shut up!« yelled a voice on the top row.

»Sit down Parson!« cried another.

»Give us a rest!« bawled a third.

»Go on with the show! Go on with the show!« a dozen voices yelled.

»Ladies and gentlemen, you will now have the pleasure of listening to Miss Muselle Malognio in her beautiful ballad entitled 'The Irish Soldier Boy's Return!'«

shouted Mr. Ryan.

The audience laughed.

»Make it a Yankee soldier back from the Philippines!« a voice called out.

There was more laughter, and many hisses, and some applause from that part of the audience in sympathy with the Emerald Isle, in the midst of which Muselle appeared and began to sing.

Now, Muselle was no spring chicken, but she had once been handsome, and knew how to make up very well.

Besides that, she had a powerful voice, and really sang finely.

Her first song was a great success, and the audience, pleased, gave her the »glad hand,« applauding vigorously.

On the encore Dannio De la Nee came out with her, and they sang a duet.

Danny had a good voice, too, and accompanied himself very creditably on the guitar.

The audience, still favorably inclined, called them out twice again before they would finally let them go.

Matters were now in a little better shape, and the audience, being in good humor, the bareback business was tried again with two other riders, both men, but one dressed up to represent a girl, who did the burning loop act.

This was what 'might be termed the tail of Wilfred Wilkington's performance.

It was coldly received, for neither of these bareback riders could ride very well.

Mr. Ryan hustled them off, and announced the human ostrich, which brought Sam Mendal to the front with a table before him, upon which lay a short sword with a trick handle, two thin glass tumblers, and a pound of wire nails.

Sam was a good-looking little fellow from the lower East Side of New York who had learned his fake act in Bowery dime museums.

Yes, Sammy was a fake—a rank one, at that.

His sword blade retreated into the handle when he put it up against his mouth, and he had a rubber bag concealed behind his broad, white shirt front, into which he managed to dispose of the glass and nails.

Now then, ladies and gentlemen, watch me!« he called out, picking up the sword and pretending to thrust the blade into his mouth.

For some reason the blade did not retreat into the handle as usual, and slipping past Sammy's glittering white teeth penetrated his tongue.

There was a yell of pain from the sword swallower, and a howl from the audience as he dropped the sword into the ring.

»Fake! Fake!« bawled the boys on the bleachers, and then some one in the front row shot off a putty blower, and the putty ball fastened itself on the end of Sammy's nose and stayed there, and this set . the bleachers into a roar.

It was no use.

Sammy tried to fix the sword, but it wouldn't work.

Then he started in to eat a tumbler.

Fate was against him.

Several of the pieces, instead of finding their way into the concealed bag, dropped down over his shirt front.

Alas for the human ostrich!

A young »Rube« sprang to his feet, far up on the bleachers.

»Hi, there! If you are hungry, that!« he bawled.

Then an elderly squash made the acquaintance of the human ostrich.

It was a squash for fair, and the yellow drippings trailed down Sammy's. shirt front, while the audience broke out into a Storm of hisses; and twenty voices called »fake« again.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WORST OF ALL.

By gracious, Mr. Ryan, matters are getting no better!« murmured poor Billy, who was taking all this in from behind. »What in the world are we going to do?«

»Blamed if I know!« growled the ring master. »Mendal's a rotten fake, anyhow, always was. He ought to be fired. If three or four of us who really understand our business could only get together and run this thing alone we might make something, but we can never hope to make anything handicapped as we are by these frauds.«

»Confound it! What's the use of talking that way?« cried Billy, angrily. »We have got to do something right now if we expect to keep that crowd from pulling the tent to pieces. They are good for it, I say.«

»All right, Billy; do whatever you blame please, You are bossing this show!«

»Yes, and I wish I wasn't,« replied Billy; »but all the same something has got to be done. Trot out Sandy. He always puts them in good humor. By thunder, he's about the only good thing in this very bad show!«

So the word was passed to »Professor Jeronimus« to bring on his elephant.

Meanwhile, Tom O'Grady was working the pipes and waltzing around the ring to his own music, while Jerry Rickers, the clown, was imitating him behind his back in a most comical way.

This started the audience' laughing again, and they were ready for Sandy when he came trotting into the ring.

Now, Sandy was actually a very disreputable elephant.

Although he was very small he was by no means young, and it was generally supposed that he had been stunted by the quantity of beer and whisky which had been given him to drink.

In short, Sandy was a regular »old soak.« As long as he got his beer he managed to keep in tolerable good humor, but let him be deprived of it, and he was as ugly as sin.

Indeed, this is the reason why »Don Patricio« was able to get him.

Once Sandy was a prominent feature in a first-class show, but he grew so bad that he was ordered killed, and then it was that »Don Patricio« stepped in and purchased him for a mere song.

So much for Sandy's history; now, for his doings in the »Jay town« of Skadonk.

Business had been bad, and beer was scarce; in fact, the wicked little elephant hadn't had a bottle in a week.

Johnson rode him around the ring, seated on his neck as usual, and then Tom started up a lively air on the bagpipes, and Sandy was pulled in to do his dance, which, if he chose he could do very well, performing with an air of owlsh solemnity which always set the audience laughing, and put them in good humor in case anything had gone wrong.

But, alas! Sandy was not dancing that day!

When Johnson got off his neck the elephant thrust out his trunk and hit the professor a whack alongside the chops.

It was no love tap, either.

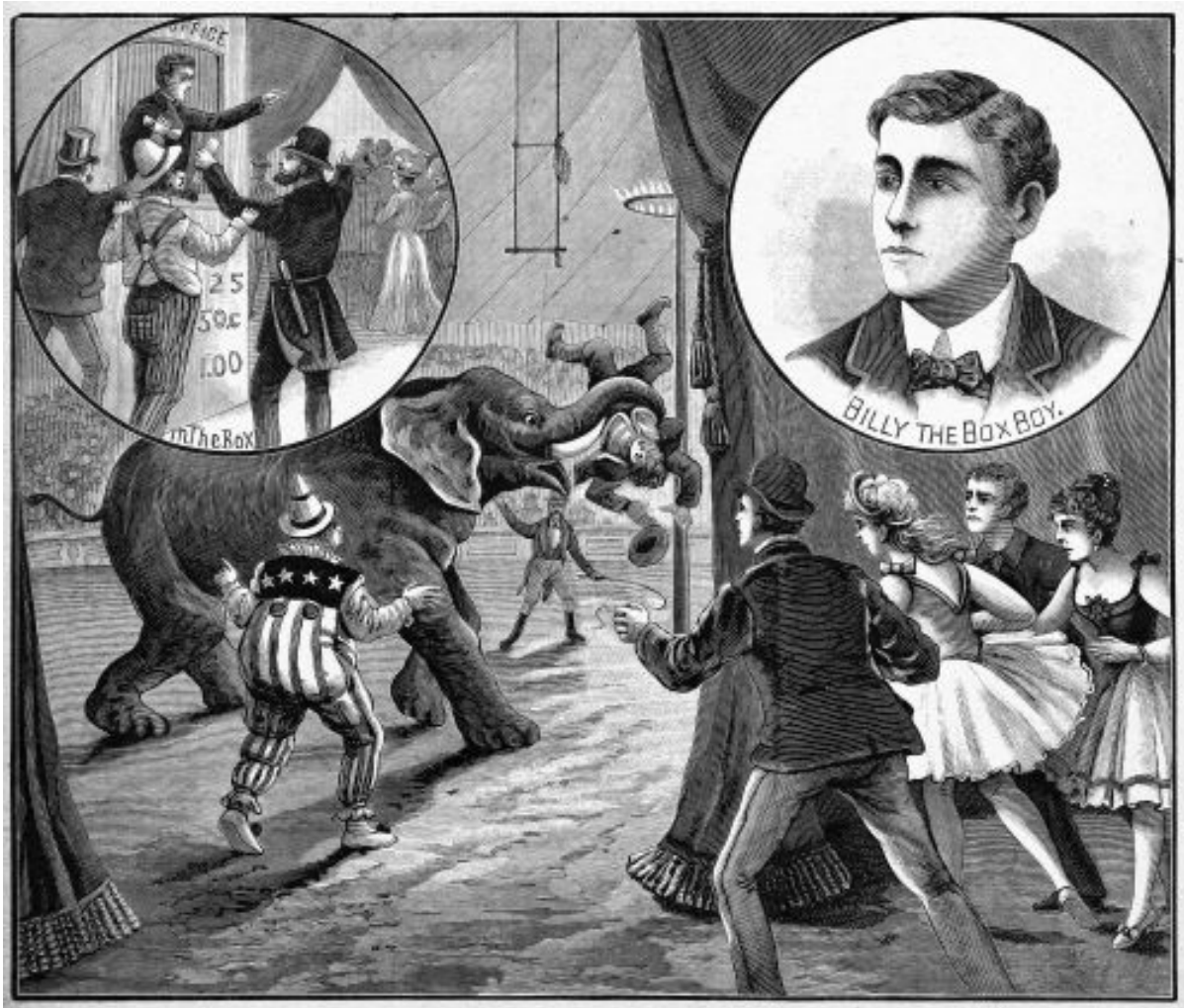
It meant: »Where's my cold bottle?«

The audience roared.

Mr. Johnson grew angry.

He had no cold bottle to give Sandy, so he up with his gilded staff of office, and on the principle that one good turn deserves another gave him a whack over the head.

This was no fool business; Johnson might have known! With that shrill, trumpetting cry which the angry elephant always gives, Sandy made a rush for his keeper, wound his trunk around the man's waist, and raised him off the ground.



With that shrill, trumpeting cry which an angry elephant always gives, Sandy made a dash for his keeper, wound his trunk around the man's waist, and raised him off the ground, and calmly trotted out of the ring with him.

Then, while the great elephant tamer's arms and legs were going like a windmill, he calmly trotted out of the ring with him, while the audience yelled and hooted themselves hoarse.

It was no use. Everything was dead against the show that night.

Matters had now reached a climax.

Somebody threw a rotten egg at Mr. Ryan, smearing his shiny, tall hat terribly.

Tom O'Grady got another, and Jerry Rickers was literally pelted out of the ring with rotten tomatoes.

Lucatte Langini, coming in on her snow-white horse, and doing some really good bareback riding, quieted them down a little, but the climax so long threatening came when Signor La Fittee, the Fire King, appeared.

Now, the Fire King was a fake, pure and simple.

He had a wash with which he covered his face, and this enabled him to make a bluff at fire eating, which was all he could do.

But, as it happened, Lafferty was »on the booze« that night.

Indeed, it was he who had provided the whisky for Wilfred Wilkington, and when he came into the ring he was almost too full for utterance, and, what was worse, had neglected to rub his face with the wash.

»Ladies and gintlemin, I will now proceed to show you how I take my breakfast!« the King called out, swaying from side to side.

He took from the table before him a small lamp, and filling it with alcohol from a tin can, lit it and thrust the flame into his mouth.

Of course this was mere baby play, and if he was sober Lafferty could not; possibly have made a miss.

But Lafferty was drunk, and the blazing alcohol spilled on his chin and ran down his shirt front.

With a roar of pain, for he was all afire in an instant, he dropped the lamp, overturning the uncorked can as he did so.

Boom!

The can caught and exploded, sending the blazing stuff flying in all directions. »Fire! Fire!« bawled Lafferty,

»Fire! Fire!« yelled the boys on the bleachers, taking up the cry.

Then all was confusion, and theze was a grandad rush to get out of the tent.

CHAPTER VII.

BILLY RUNS AGAINST A BLIND MAN.

The finish of the show had come, so far as that night's exhibition was concerned.

Wilfred Wilkington began it, Sandy, the elephant, gave it a boost, and Lafferty put the final setting on it by setting the sawdust on fire.

This was the result of the alcohol.

It flew all over when the can burst, and everywhere it struck there was a blaze.

Lafferty was pretty badly burned, and ran off yelling for help.

This started up the boys, and the cry of fire resounded on all sides.

A grand scramble followed, and in that scramble, to make matters more complicated, one end of the bleachers collapsed.

The young fellows and their girls went tumbling down all in a heap.

Screams and yells resounded on all sides.

Billy and Mr. Ryan rushed into the ring and stamped out the flames as best they could.

The canvas men and others ran over to the fallen benches and did the rescue act, getting all out without serious injury.

This would seem to be enough to satisfy anybody.

The boys of Skadonk did not see it so, however, and were seized with a desire for revenge.

Suddenly—it was just as the house was about emptied—there came a wild cry, and a mob of boys, and some men with them, came bursting into the tent.

Before any one could stop them they pulled down the centre pole, causing the whole tent to collapse, and with hoots and yells made their way out from under the fallen canvas the best way they could.

It was great fun for them, but a miserable nuisance for the tired show people.

They were pretty well used to it, however, It was not the first time this thing had occurred.

The small tent in which was the »green room,« the elephant's quarters, etc., did not fall with the rest.

Lafferty and Danny Delaney were for rushing in on the intruders and starting up a free fight, but Billy planted himself in the entrance and barred the way.

»No, no, gentlemen; don't you do it!« he exclaimed. »What good will it do? We have got to take the tent down, anyway. There is nothing for us in getting up a fight.«

Thus Billy kept them quiet until the mob retreated, the boys making great sport of getting out from under the fallen tent.

Billy then gave his orders, and the canvas men gathered up the tent properly, and stowed it away in the wagons.

It was now nearly eleven o'clock, and as it began to look like rain Billy urged Mrs. Johnson to hurry up with her cooking, which had to be done in the open, for it was always their custom to have a bite of supper after the show.

While this was going on the performers gathered about Billy, who stood talking with Mr. Ryan at the door of the small tent.

»Say, Boss Hunt!« exclaimed Signor La Fittee, who had rubbed his face all over with vaseline, and looked like a greased pig; »say, we fellers want some of that box money, you may as well understand.«

»You won't get it,« replied Billy. »That money don't belong to me, as you know perfectly well.«

»It belongs to us, boy,« said Wilfred Wilkington, now very drunk, as he came staggering up. »We are all six weeks behind in our pay, and I for one say it's time something was done.«

»You've done for us, all right, Willy,« sneered Mr. Ryan. »Only for you getting a skate on we might have stood another night here.«

»What's the matter with doing it now?« demanded the »Fire King« thickly.

»You're the matter, for one thing,« said Billy, »You came near burning us all up to-night, and to-morrow you will probably do it. There's no use hanging around here. We had better move out of town shortly after midnight, and that brings me to another business. Muselle, I want to speak to you.«

»To me, Billy?« called Miss Malognio, who was helping Mrs. Johnson over the gypsy kettle where the supper was cooking. »Am I to come in for my share of the blame? What have I done?«

»You will have to give up that child, Muselle.«

»Which I never will, Billy.«

»Well, you will. We shall all be arrested for kidnapping if you don't,« said Mr. Ryan, »Billy came near being pulled in as it was. Where is the child now?«

»She's asleep up in the woods in a nest I fixed for her,« declared Miss Malognio, »and there she is going to stay until we are ready to start, and then she goes along with us! Do you think I'll give her up to that hag to be flayed alive and burned with red-hot pokers? No; you bet I won't! Never! I'll go to jail first. I've adopted the little pet, and with me she is going to stay!«

There was a big argument about it.

Lucette Langini sided with Miss Muselle, and so did all the other ladies of the company.

The men were rather indifferent; of them seemed to want to interfere.

»There will be trouble about it,« declared Billy. »There will be trouble, as sure as fate. That farmer isn't the man to give up. Wait till we get on the move, and you will see something happen sure.«

»Meantime, we want our money,« persisted Signor Lafferty.

»That's what,« added Sam Mendal. »If anybody expects to do my act without getting paid they'll get left.«

Billy was on the point of saying something about Sam's act, but he wisely held his tongue.

This did him no good, however, for what he didn't say Ryan did.

»Your act!« cried the ring master sneeringly. »It would be a blame sight better for us if you were to quit right now. It was your act which queered the show.«

This made Sam furious.

First it was hot words, and then Sam jumped on Ryan.

»A fight! A fight!« roared the great De la Nee. »Fair play, boys! Fair play! Let them fight it out!«

Evidently they meant to.

Ring-master Ryan came of fighting stock, and he sailed into the human ostrich in great shape, while the others formed a ring, Wilkington and Lafferty siding with Sam, and Delany shouting out:

»Go in, Ryan! Punch the stuffin out of the Yiddish snoozer!« and similar encouraging remarks:

»Gentlemen, gentlemen, for heaven's sake don't!« pleaded Billy. »We shall have a crowd down here if you make so much noise, and sure as fate we shall all be pulled in!«

But there was no stopping them, and in the end Ryan wiped the grass with the human ostrich, but while he was about it poor Billy stole away, and passed out of the fair grounds unobserved.

He was sick and tired of it all.

It was his opinion that »Don Patricio« had run away, and that Manager Whiffles had followed him.

»They don't mean to come back, either of them,« Billy kept saying to himself. »I've a great mind to turn the money over and let all hands divide it up. That will be my chance to light out, too.«

He had reached the road now, and was walking along with his head down, deep in thought, when all at once he ran into a man who was coming the other way.

»Hello!« cried Billy. » Why in thunder can't you look where you are going, friend?«

»That's just what I can't do,« replied the man: »I am blind:«

»Blind? Why, it's the blind man I let in to see the show!« cried Billy, recognizing the man now.

»Do you mean that for a joke?« asked the blind man, leaning on his staff. »I went in because I wanted to hear the bagpipe play. I'm a Scotchman. I haven't heard such good piping in many years; but, say, young man, I think you are the very fellow I want to find. Are you the boss of that bad show?«

CHAPTER VIII.

JUMPING THE TOWN..

»Bad show!« flashed Billy, for although he was always running down the show himself he objected to anyone else doing it.

»Seeing that you went in on a free ticket, you might be a little more civil, I think.«

»Oh, that's all right. I beg your pardon for saying anything against your show,« replied the blind man. »Don't mind me. I'm nobody. I'm just an old blind pauper who hangs around this town. Nobody ever minds what I say. Where's the boss?«

»I'm the boss.«

»But you are only a boy?«

»Can't help it; I'm the boss. What do you want?«

»Anyhow, it was you who gave me the free ticket,« said the blind man, »and it's you I ought to warn.«

»To warn about what? What do you mean?«

»They are after you, young fellow. There are half a dozen men up at the hotel—strangers in town. They drove over from the railroad, and they are going for your show.«

»Hello! An attachment!« cried Billy.

»It's the elephant they want,« said the blind man. »They were talking about attaching him. They came from Rahway, and they have all the papers, they say. They mean to seize everything of any value, but it's the elephant they particularly want.«

»Is that so?« exclaimed Billy; »Well, when they get him they get everything that is of any value. Are they coming up to the Fair Grounds now?«

»That's what I came to tell you,« said the blind man. »They are not coming at all. They expect the move some time during the night, and they mean to lay for you at the hotel. As you pass you will be arrested and the elephant seized. You were kind to me, young fellow, so I thought I would come and warn you. I'm going back now. Look out for yourself when you go past the hotel.«

»I'm ever so much obliged,« said Billy. »Hold on a minute, will you? I don't want to lose the elephant. I want to think what is best to do. Do you know anything about the country around here?«

»Know all about it,« replied the blind man. »I used to travel all over these woods before I was struck blind.«

»How did it happen?«

»Blasting in a quarry.«

»Oh! _Is there no hope for you?«

»No, none at all; but you were asking about the back. roads around here?«

»I didn't say anything about the back roads.«

»No; but that's what you meant. tell you all about them.«

»I wish you would. I'll give you five dollars if you will. We must save the elephant.«

A long talk with the blind man followed.

Billy went back to the tent after that.

The performers were at supper, and everything was as quiet as though no fight had occurred.

Billy sat down to take a bite, and-as he ate he told his story, which started them all up again.

»We have got to get right out,« said Mr. Ryan; »that's' all there is about it. I thought those Rahway fellows would be after us. If we lose Sandy the jig is up.«

»Oh, my baby!« cried Muselle. »They shan't take her from me. Billy, you must stand by me. It would be downright wicked to let that old hag get» Mamie again.«

The pretty little girl was asleep in Muselle's arms now, and really Billy could not make up his mind to say a word about giving her up.

Besides, how could it be done, when to go down into the village would only lead to arrest?

»We must start right out through the woods and make for South River, where we are billed to appear day after to-morrow,« he said. »This Rum road that the blind man talks about is a rough one, but we can travel it, I guess. What I propose is that Johnson and I start with Sandy right now. You can get everything together and follow us, Mr. Ryan. In that way we shall dodge 'em. If we lose the elephant and the horses, of course the game is up.«

»It's a good idea,« said the ring« master. »Give us full directions, Billy. It won't do to miss you. I'm not much used to traveling in the woods.«

»Let us go with you, Billy!« exclaimed Muselle, »Danny can drive the carryall. Anyhow, the ladies don't want to be in it if there's to be an arrest and a free fight.«

Billy could not refuse.

Only thing that worried him was the child, for to have little Mamie found in the carryall in case they were overtaken meant the arrest of all hands on a charge of kidnapping.

The horses were harnessed into the old carryall, and the ladies having got aboard they were driven out through the back gate of the Fair Grounds and into

the woods, which were within two hundred yards of the fence.

Here an old road led across country for many miles.

In Revolutionary times it had been the stage road, but later, when the new turnpike was built, it had been abandoned, and now was pretty well overgrown with trees and bushes.

This was the »Rum Road,« as people called it, on account of an old moonshine rum distillery which was supposed to be away back in the woods.

Along the road Billy was now picking his way, closely followed by Johnson, who was leading Sandy, while not far behind came, the carryall and the ladies.

As for the rest of the show, it would take time to get that started.

This was Billy's first experience in jumping a town.

»Mah gollys, Billy, but it's powerful dark here!« cried Johnson. »Say, if we get lost in dis yere forest it will be a bad job.«

»We are not going to get lost, Johnson,« replied Billy confidentially; »not if I know myself, and I think I do.«

»Thats all right. Billy; just the same it's gwine ter rain again.

»I didn't say it wasn't,« replied Billy. »I think it is myself.«

»And you are sure you know the way?«

»Of course I am. Didn't the blind man tell me?«

»Dunno 'bout de utility ob dat, Billy. When I uster read mah scriptures—dem was de days afore I got into de show business—I reckomembers reading somefin' about de blind a-leading de blind, and bofe tumbling into de ditch. Say, I don't mind tumbling into de ditch myself, but I do mind having Sandy tumble on top ob me. Yah! Yah! Yah! Hi! You long-nosed debbil! What you pull back fo', hey?«

Johnson was leading Sandy by means of a rope tied around his tusk, and Sandy suddenly took a notion to pull the other way.

It took some persuasion to induce him to go on.

This time Johnson succeeded in quieting the big brute, but about half an hour later, while Johnson was at some distance ahead, Sandy began to cut up ugly again.

He gave one tremendous pull and broke the rope.

The next thing Johnson knew Sandy had wheeled around, and was charging for the carryall.

»Oh! Oh! The elephant! Sandy has gone crazy. Save us! Save us!« Miss Malognio yelled.

»Johnson! Where are you, Johnson?« bawled Delany.

The elephant never turned aside, but charged straight for the horses.

The frightened animals reared and plunged, making confusion more confounded, while the screams of the ladies rang out through the darkness.

Billy heard but did not see.

Turning, he went dashing back to render such help as he was able.

»We are up against trouble!« he muttered, »and I am afraid there is worse to come!«

CHAPTER IX.

ALL IN A MUDDLE.

Billy had a lantern.

Although that fact may not have been mentioned yet, such was the case.

He was supposed to be lighting the way for the elephant and the carryall.

As for the horses and the tent wagons, they had not come up yet, although it was high time.

Waving his lantern before him, Billy ran back along the wood road just in time to see Sandy take a sudden turn.

Changing his mind about charging the horses, the elephant suddenly plunged into the woods on the right-hand side of the road, and went on down a steep incline where it was all rocks and bushes, a horrible place, through which even in the daytime it was as much as a man's life was worth to go.

»——! ——! ---! -----!«

That's what Professor Jeronomus, alias Johnson, the great elephant tamer from the Soudan, said.

We don't care to print the professor's remarks for the very good reason that they wouldn't look well in print.

But the professor was a worker as well as a talker, and he went dashing after Sandy, regardless of rocks, rattlesnakes, the darkness, and all the rest.

Meanwhile, the horses, or Delany, it is hard to tell which, had backed the carryall upon the side of the bank, where one hind wheel had entangled itself with a stone.

»Ketch hold of 'em, Billy!« cried Danny. »For heaven's sake get me down out of this!«

»Be quick! Be quick, or he'll have us upset and killed!« called Muselle.- »Oh, I wish I had never came! Danny don't know any more about driving than a cat.«

»True for ye, Miss Maloney!« snapped the great De la Nee, dropping into his brogue. »It's yoursilf that will do the driving after this, for I'll not be bothering wid the fidence in me equestrian skill.«

Billy, who had got the wagon down on a level, left them to fight it out between themselves, and started into the woods and down over the rocks to help Johnson catch Sandy.

»Hey! Hi! Ho! Hello! You ain't going to leave us without a light, are you?« shouted Delany. »Come back with that lantern now!«

»I've got to see to Sandy first of all!« answered Billy. »It's a straight road. Drive on, Dan. You can't go astray!«

»Faith, an' it's meself that thinks we have already gone astray!« cried Danny.

»If we were not on the wrong road wouldn't the boys have come up with us by this time? Oh! Howly St. Patrick! What's that?«

The deep baying of a dog was heard in the distance.

Muselle screamed, and Lucette screamed louder.

Danny, who seemed to think that all the wild beasts painted on the show canvas were after them, gave his horses the whip, and the old carryall went lurching on through the ruts and over the stones.

Billy could hear it moving, but he paid no attention to it. The most valuable piece of property connected with the bad show was in danger, and the youthful boss was determined: to save poor Sandy from himself, if he could.

»He could hear the elephant plunging along for a few moments, and then the sounds suddenly ceased, and it was only Johnson's noise that was to be heard.

»Johnson! Johnson!« shouted Billy. »Wait for me to come up!«

»I spec's I shall have to, Billy,« came the answer from close by, »for blame me if I keah to go down!«

»What's the matter?« called Billy.

»Dunno, boss, 'Spec's it's a hole ob some kind.«

»Where's Sandy?«

»Now, Billy, dat ar am de question. I done kep' a-hearin' him till jest a minute ago, and then didn't hear him no mo'. 'Spec's he must have fallen down into de hole. Dat's what!«

Billy's heart sank.

Sandy was worth a lot of money.

Although the creditors of this bad show were after them hot foot, he still had hopes of saving the elephant from their clutches.

The dog barked again.

It was more of a deep bay than a bark, and it sounded to Billy like a bloodhound.

Johnson, who was brought up in the South, recognized the sound, which perhaps he knew only too well.

»Fo' de Lawd, dat. ar's a bloodhound, Billy!« he exclaimed. »Do you s'pose dem fellers would be wicked enough to hunt us down wif dah dawegs?«

»Sounds like it,« replied Billy. »Ah! Here you are! I couldn't tell where to look for you. Johnson, it must be a stream down there!«

Johnson was standing on the edge of a high bank, over which it was the greatest wonder in the world he had not fallen.

»I 'spec's dat's what it is,« he replied; »but how on earth did Sandy get down? Dat's what I want to know.«

»He never did get down here.«

»Must have. I followed him right to dis heah place.«

»Never! You made a mistake. Let's go back and look for the trail, Hello! There he is now!«

Billy did not see the elephant, but he could hear him.

Sandy was trumpeting off somewhere in the gloom.

At the same instant the bay of the bloodhound was heard again, and some large animal went rushing through the underbrush at no great distance from where they stood.

»There's the elephant! Dave has got on to him!« a voice was heard calling among the trees.

»Bad luck!« gasped Billy. »It's a shame! Would they destroy poor Sandy that way? It shan't be!«

A splash was heard.

The hound had leaped into the water, and could be heard still splashing close down under the bank.

Billy hastily extinguished his lantern, thankful that it had not yet been seen.

»This way, Johnson,« he whispered, »I've got my revolver. Two can play at this game! What we want is to get down into that stream!«

In a moment they came to a broad break in the bushes where everything had been trampled down.

»Sandy went through here, all right,« declared Johnson.

At the same instant the elephant began trumpeting wildly, and the deep bay of the bloodhound explained the cause.

»On, Johnson, on!« cried Billy. »Everything is in a muddle, but we must save Sandy if we can!«

CHAPTER X.

IN THE OLD RUM DISTILLERY.

In following the trail of Sandy the elephant, Billy the Box Boy and the man supposed to come from the Soudan had undertaken a big contract—bigger than they knew.

It would have been all right if it had been daylight.

Perhaps they might have followed the elephant's trail if Billy had kept the lantern lighted.

But Billy put out the lantern and was trying to see it in the dark.

That's where the size of the contract came in.

Inside of two minutes Billy and Johnson were off the trail, although they labored under the delusion that they were right on it.

Instead they had passed on to the Rum road again, which here took a bend and came down toward the stream.

The road was so overgrown that they never guessed.

Now and then the voices of the men calling to each other could also be heard.

But all these sounds grew fainter and fainter.

Billy could not understand the reason and Johnson was equally in the dark.

And yet it was all simple enough if they had only known.

Right here the creek took a side bend, crossing the Rum road further along.

The dog was in the creek and the men were following along the bank.

What had become of Sandy will soon be seen.

»Johnson, we have gone astray,« said Billy after a little.

»Blamed if I don't think so, Billy.«

»That's what. We are lost.

»Sure as eber yo' lib! Say, hadn't we better go back?«

»No, no! Let's keep on. I think we shall strike the stream further down.«

»What makes yo' tink so, Billy?«

»Can't tell you. Something seems to tell me so, though. I don't believe in going back.«

»That's right. Yo' are one of the kind that's always going ahead, Billy. Dat's yo'.«

»Hark!«

»What now?«

»Thought I heard the sound of wheels.«

»Gee! I don't hear wheels, but I does hear suffin' else, dough.«

»Right you are! It's some big animal coming through the bushes.«

»Spose it's a bear!«

»Nonsense! Are there bears in this part of Jersey?«

»Dunno. Dunno nuffin bout what part of Jersey de bars lib in, 'cept dat I nebber seen none around Hoboken 'cept dey was chained.«

»More likely it's somebody's old cow.«

»Might be. It's a-comin' right on anyhow. Mebbe it's de dawg.«

Far in the distance the bay of the blood-hound was again heard.

»It isn't the dog,« said Billy; »at least not that one, but whatever it is it's right on us. I guess-I'll get out the revolver. Here, you light the lantern, John.'

Johnon's hands trembled as he touched the match to the lantern.

The crashing among the bushes grew louder and louder.

From the first Billy had mistrusted what it was and he was consequently not surprised when Sandy came bursting out into the road ahead of them.

The elephant stopped. short and turned toward the lantern, trumpeting with joy.

»Fo' de lawd! Why it's Sandy!« cried Johnson. »Oh, yo' villyun! Won't I pound de life outer yo!«

»Careful! Careful! Don't get excited,« breathed Billy. »Give me the lantern, John. Get the rifle ready. He's given the dog the slip, but he's scared half to death. See him tremble. He'll let you take him all right. Sandy! Come!«

Now Sandy was one of the wisest elephants that ever waved his trunk.

He knew that he had made a bad break and he was just as eager to be taken captive as Johnson was to capture him, and he showed his feelings by commencing the dance which he wouldn't do that night in the tent.

First on one foot and then on the other Sandy began hopping.

He waved his trunk and opened his big mouth and trumpeted loud and shrill.

Johnson got his rope ready and soon had it in place.

»We are all right now,« he said, »unless the dog comes. We wanter get back to de carryall dough.«

»The carryall is ahead of us,« said Billy. »Don't you hear the wheels? As for the dog if it comes our way I'll shoot it. Hello! Just as I thought. We are going to have another storm!« |

A sharp flash of lightning lit up the forest and then came the thunder and the rain.

»Billy! Billy! Billy!« a voice was heard calling in the distance. The creaking of the wagon wheels could no longer be heard.

»That's Delany,« said Johnson.

»Of course,« replied Billy, and he answered the call.

»Where are you, Billy!« was shouted back.

»I'm right here,« replied Billy. »Where are you?«

»Nine miles from nowhere, I guess. We have got to the end of the road sure. Have you caught Sandy? I heard him talking a minute ago!«

Another thunder clap drowned Billy's answer.

The rain was coming down in torrents and as the storm promised to be a heavy one Billy was very anxious to join the ladies.

Johnson now mounted the elephant's neck—Sandy had been so trained and always behaved himself so—and they pushed on as rapidly as possible.

In a few moments they came to a bridge which crossed the stream and there on the side stood a ruinous old factory.

This was the old rum distillery.

The road ended here and Billy saw that they had taken the wrong turning further back; something that the blind man had particularly warned him against, by the way.

The carryall was under a shed and Danny Delany came out to meet them, giving them a hearty welcome in his warm Irish way.

»Oh, I'm so glad you have come, Billy,« he cried, »and so glad you have got Sandy, too. Sure, you are the boy who never gets left. What's to be done with the elephant? Did you hear the dogs barking? Do you think it can be that sheriff man after us?«

»Well, I'm sure of it,« replied Billy, »and we must work quick, for they will be here soon. We have taken the wrong road, Danny. Everything is going wrong tonight.«

»Yes, and we can't move out of here till daylight. That's one sure thing, Billy!« called Muselle from the doorway of the old distillery. I wouldn't take my chances again with Danny driving that wagon for all the money in the world.«

Of course that great de la Nee had some remarks to make in answer to this.

Billy did not stop to listen to them, however, for it was necessary to look after Sandy as the baying of the bloodhound could now be heard again.

The shed was entirely insecure.

The floor of the distillery was manifestly unable to bear the elephant, so nothing remained but to run Sandy into the cellar or basement which opened on a

level with the ground under the bank.

So they ran the elephant into the cellar and then the horses were driven down the bank and put in there, too.

Billy made the door fast by putting an iron rod which he found in through two great staples which had once been used to receive a wooden bar for the same purpose.

»Now, then, let them come on with their dogs!« he exclaimed. »We have got the fort and we will hold it against all odds.«

CHAPTER XI.

SANDY AND THE SHERIFF.

It was a tremendous thunderstorm while it lasted.

For a few moments Billy thought the whole crazy old mass of bricks and beams was going to come crashing about their ears.

Muselle did nothing but scream, standing with her face in the corner.

Lucette stopped her ears with her fingers and hid her face under her skirts, which she threw over her head, but little Mamie slept through it all wrapped up in one of Miss Malognio's great shawls.

Johnson was downstairs looking out for the livestock while Billy and Delany stood by the open door watching the progress of the storm.

»Sure, Billy, an' what do you suppose has ever become of the byes and the horses and the tent?« questioned the balladist. »They have been scooped in by the sheriff, sure.«

»Oh, I don't think so,« replied Billy.

»What then?«

»It's a case of the wrong road.«

»I thought we were in the wrong road. You said so, you know.«

»That's what I mean. They have kept along the right road while we have managed to lose ourselves. I shouldn't wonder if they were safe in South River with the tent by this time.«

»It's meself that's in hopes you are right, Billy. I don't want to see no more trouble. But say, what are you going to do about that money? Don't you think you ought to divide it if Whiffles don't come back?«

»Don't know, Danny. The money is not mine. I want to do the right thing.«

»The right thing would be to give me a couple of weeks' back pay right now, Billy.«

»Pshaw, Danny! Why, that would take it all and where would the rest come in? No, no! It won't do. Whiffles made me boss of this show and boss I mean to be till I give up the job for good.«

Delany was about to answer this when suddenly the bay of the bloodhound was heard close to them.

»It's the dog! He's coming!« gasped Delany. »Billy, what are we going to do?«

»Shoot him if he comes too close,« replied Billy coolly.

He drew his revolver and stood ready.

There was only a moment to wait.

Then all at once a huge Danish bloodhound came bounding out of the woods.

It was a fearful-looking brute, almost as big as a calf with a lolling tongue and fangs all exposed; it made a rush for Billy—Delany had taken to his heels and vanished inside.

Now he had an excuse to shoot it, while before he had been rather in doubt what to do.

Billy was a crack shot in his way.

For several months he had been practicing with glass balls.

He felt sure of taking the big Dane in a vital spot if he only had light enough to see what he was doing.

Fortune favored the boy, for at that instant came the brightest flash of all.



Crack! Crack! Billy fired twice. Which shot killed the bloodhound is doubtful, but one did it. With a fearful cry the big brute leaped into the air and fell dead at Billy's feet. »Sure, you have fixed him!« cried Delany looking out of the window.

»Crack! Crack!«

Billy fired twice.

Which shot killed the bloodhound is doubtful, but one did it.

With a fearful cry the big brute leaped into the air and fell dead at Billy's feet.

»Sure, you have fixed him!« cried Delany looking out of the window.

»What is it?« called Johnson from below. »Is it that dog again?« :

»Shut the door, Johnson, and keep it shut!« cried Billy. »This job is only just begun!«

Shots were heard. Someone was coming through the bushes.

A moment more and two men came out into the open.

One carried a lantern and both were drenched to the skin.

»Blast you! what have you been doing?« yelled the companion of the man with the lantern. »Have you shot my dog?«

»I've just shot a dog!« retorted Billy.

Tall language from the man with the lantern.

He whipped out a »revolver, bawling that he would »carve« Billy.

But the boss of the bad show was there before him. »Take your lesson right now,« he said steadily, and before the man could get his revolver out Billy had his up and ready for business.

»Drop it! Drop it!« he cried. you muss with me!«

The man with the revolver thought he wouldn't.

»You will a pay for this, boy!« he snared.

»That dog was worth five hundred dollars if he was worth one cent!«

»Then you ought to have taken better care of him. What business have you to set him on me?«

The man with the lantern whispered something and the other cooled down.

»Who are you, anyway?« he demanded. »Do you belong to that bad show what showed in Skadonk to-night?«

»Yes I do—what then?«

»I want to see the boss.«

»I'm the boss.«

»You are only a boy.«

»That don't make any difference. I'm the boss; what do you want?«

»Is your show here?«

»Some of it. Why do you ask? What right have you get to question me?«

»I'm the sheriff of this county. I've got a writ of attachment against Reilly & Whiffles. Are either of them here?«

»No; neither of them.«

»Are the horses here?«

»We have two horses here, yes.«

»And the elephant?«

»Yes, the elephant is here, too.«

Delany and Miss Malognio, who were in the doorway listening, wondered to hear Billy admit it.

But Billy knew what he was about.

If the sheriff really had the writ tiers was no use in denying the presence of the elephant—there was no use anyhow. Besides Billy was relying upon Sandy to take care of himself.

»Let me see your writ,« he said, »I'm not going to stand out against the law, but I don't propose to have an elephant worth five thousand dollars hunted with bloodhounds. There's no sense in that.«

»We will settle about the dog later,« said the sheriff who seemed to realize that he had put himself in a bad position by taking the risk of destroying the very property he had been charged to preserve.

»Trot out your elephant. We will attend to his case. We want your horses, too.«

»And what's to become of the ladies if you steal our horses?« screamed Miss Malognio. »I think you are perfectly horrid. Don't let him touch Sandy, Billy! It's a shame!«

»It must be done,« replied Billy. »Johnson!« he called. »Oh, Johnson! Open the door and let these gentlemen in.«

Now Johnson had perfect confidence. in Billy and would have obeyed him no matter what he was told to do.

So Johnson opened the door and all hands went into the cellar of the old rum distillery.

»And that's the elephant!« cried the sheriff so pleased with his capture that he almost forgot the loss of the bloodhound. What's his name?«

»Sandy,« replied Billy giving Johnson the wink as the lantern was held upon Sandy's face.«

At the same time he whispered something in the Professor's ear.

»Huh!« chuckled Johnson. »I guess yes.«

»Sandy! Sandy! Hello Sandy!« cried the sheriff advancing toward the elephant and holding out his hand.

Just then Johnson said something.

So did Sandy in his more peculiar way.

Up went his trunk and the sheriff got a swipe alongside the head which knocked him over.

»Oh! Oh! He's killed me!« roared the sheriff.

But Sandy had only just begun.

He made one stride forward and catching the sheriff »amidships« gravely trotted out of doors with the struggling man in his trunk and dropped him into

the creek, after which he commenced to dance, first on one foot and then on the other as much as to say:

»Oh, see what I've done!«

CHAPTER XII.

MORE TROUBLE AT SOUTH RIVER.

The sheriff scrambled out on the other side of the creek wild with rage.

»Capture that elephant! Bring him over here!« he shouted to his assistant, but he did not show the least disposition to come back to the old rum distillery himself.

»Capture nothing!« cried the man who had retreated to a safe distance. »Come and capture him yourself if you want him!«

»Don't let any one dare to lay a hand on him!« shouted Billy. »I am here to protect this elephant and I propose to do it sheriff or no sheriff!«

Johnson led Sandy back into the cellar then.

Billy and the others retreated into the room upstairs.

»We are ready for you!« shouted Billy, taking his place just inside the door with his revolver in hand. »Now come on if you dare!«

There was some further talk and bluff on the part of the sheriff, but he did not venture nearer than the bridge.

Billy made no answer, and Delany, by his orders, kept quiet, too.

At last the sheriff and his man finding that they could make no headway, gave it up and went off breathing threats of vengeance and promising to return again with a force which would be sufficient to capture the elephant and all hands.

Not a word was said about little Mamie, however, and Billy began to hope that Farmer Van Dunk had given it up.

It rained all night until four o'clock, and Billy, who had remained constantly on guard, woke up the ladies and Delany and started back along the Rum road.

They easily found the place where they had made the mistake and turned off, and by nine o'clock they came into the little town of South River.

Sandy's appearance on the main street as usual attracted a great deal of attention and drew a crowd at once.

»Can you tell me if the rest of our show got in here during the night?« Billy asked the crowd.

He was told that they had come in and were then on a certain lot at the end of the village.

Billy hurried to the place, Delany driving the carriage along the muddy road and Johnson following with the elephant and the crowd.

Much to Billy's relief he soon caught sight of the tent and in a few moments more Sandy was safely housed.

There had been no attempt made to interfere with the horses or any part of the show, so Billy began to hope that he had seen the most of the business and he at once started in on his preparations for the afternoon's performance, determined to take all the money out of the town he could.

Now Billy had ideas and he put a new one into practice now.

Instead of giving the wretched. street parade which invariably got them into trouble, he made Johnson dress up in the most gorgeous costume the property chest contained: and mount Sandy's neck, where he sat perfectly upright with his gilt staff raised, looking like an ebony statue, and as the elephant paced his way slowly along the street Johnson never moved.

Ahead of him rode Billy himself, mounted on a milk white pony throwing small bills right and left, while Tom O'Grady led off with his bagpipe, keeping it up right lively.

If there was anyone in South River who liked. bagpipe music they got a full supply that morning and Tom's music was good of its kind, too.

When they got up by the bandstand Billy halted and let the crowd gather around the elephant and have a good look at him.

This was the chance he was waiting for and Billy proceeded to improve it.

»Ladies and gentlemen!« he called out, »I want to say a word to you about our show which to open on the old circus lot on Cross street this afternoon. Our bills style us the 'Greatest show in the world!' Of course it is hardly necessary to tell you that this claim is only intended for a joke. We are only a little one, but there are good points about us just the same. Come and see our dancing elephant! Come and see our wonderful bareback riders! Come and see our fire king and our human ostrich! We have got them all and we will try to please you with them, but you are all sensible people here in South River, and you understand that it would be impossible for us to exhibit all the animals out of Noah's Ark for the small sum of twenty-five cents!«

Now Billy had a good strong voice and a pleasant way with him and he jollied the people into thorough good humor.

The result was a large audience and a lenient one in the tent that afternoon.

They applauded everything and found fault with nothing,

The show was better, too, for everybody was Sober.

Wilfred Wilkington was really a good bareback rider and he quite surpassed himself that afternoon.

Lucette rode with him.

Formerly their two acts had been separate, one at the beginning and the other near the close of the show, but Billy thought it better to combine them in one and it worked first rate, and put the audience in thorough good humor.

It was the same with Sandy.

The elephant was in good humor, too, and danced and did his tricks in fine style.

Lafferty got on first rate with his fire-eating and for a wonder made no breaks.

Even Sam Mendal fooled them on the ostrich business.

No one seemed to tumble to the bag under his shirt and when he bit the tumbler to pieces they believed that all the glass went down his throat and that the tenpenny nails followed it.

Sam actually got an encore, which was a very unusual thing.

Best of all Billy took in fifty dollars in the box and everything was proceeding in fine shape when a big farm horse barge suddenly drove up to the tent and some twenty men jumped out!

It was the sheriff and a posse big enough to do business.

»Where's the boy? He's that's boss?« cried the sheriff, pointing to Billy, who was standing by the door of the tent.

CHAPTER XIII.

EVERYBODY ALL MIXED UP.

It did seem too bad—with Billy just beginning to do business, too.

It was no use kicking, though.

The box boy was up against trouble now, for first out of the barge was Constable Carker, who waved a warrant in Billy's face.

»You are my prisoner, young man; and if you know what's good for you, you will go quietly!« the constable exclaimed.

»What am I arrested for?« demanded Billy. »What have I done?«

»What haven't you done!« snapped the constable. »You killed the sheriff's valuable Dane dog, for one thing, but the main charge against you is kidnapping! We want that young one, and we know she is with this show.«

Billy was in despair.

It was no use to say anything, though, for two of the men now seized him, and the constable proceeded to search the boy.

This started Billy talking.

He was loud in his protests against the outrage.

All to no purpose.

The box money was all taken from him, and so was his revolver—and in the end Constable Carker snapped a pair of handcuffs about his wrists.

Meanwhile, the sheriff and his posse were busy inside the tent.

They made their way around to the rear and levied on all the horses, the elephant, the wagons and the tent itself.

»You can finish your show, gentlemen!« shouted the sheriff. »Finish out your programme. I will take my stand in the ring, and my men will watch here. Understand, nothing is to be removed under any circumstances. If any one attempts to do so, that one will find himself in jail.«

This was said behind the scenes, and then the sheriff went out into the ring and took his stand beside Mr. Ryan, who was just overjoyed to have him there, of course.

Billy was hurried around the tent by the constable.

»Who has that child?« Carker kept saying. »Who's got that child?«

»Find out!« snapped Billy. »I've nothing to do with the child, and I told you so. You will not prove anything by me.«

He wondered what had become of Muselle, for he had sent her warning by one of the canvasmen the moment he saw the barge come driving up to the tent.

He need not have troubled himself about Miss Malognio.

That lady took the hint and was now nowhere to-be found.

Carker and his men went all over, searching, but could find no trace of little Mamie: and Billy, handcuffed like a murderer, sat there watching while this was going on.

»Well, what are you going to do with me?« he asked the constable when Mr. Carker gave it up at last. »Mind, now, I shall hold you responsible for all this. You have taken that money from me, and you will have to account for it to the last cent.«

»I'll take care of that,« sneered the constable. »Wait till I get you in the stone jug at Skadonk, young feller! We'll fix you off. We'll make you tell what has become of that child!«

Just then there was a yell from the ring, immediately followed by howls of laughter from the audience.

Jerry Rickers was responsible for it.

Lucette and Wilkington were riding again. Ringmaster Ryan was snapping his long whip, and the clown snatched it away from him and ran.

»Here! Here, you white-faced idiot! Come back with my whip!« yelled Ryan, pretending to be very much offended.

Jerry began snapping the long lash and shouting:

»Hoop-la! Hoop-la!«

Jerry had a sort of back-snap which he could do to perfection. He knew how to make the lash fly in any direction he pleased.

»Hoop-la! Hoop-la!« bawled Jerry.

»Look out there! You will hit me, next thing you know!« the sheriff shouted, as the lash came within an inch of his left ear.

»Hoop-la! Hoop-la!« yelled Jerry, pretending not to hear.

The sheriff dodged the lash and Jerry jumped, and with another »Hoop-la! and a hoop-la!« snapped again, taking the sheriff over the right ear, making him yell with pain.

»Blame you! Look out what you are about!« the sheriff shouted.

»Hoop-la! Hoop-la!« cried Jerry, and this time the whip lash got entangled between the sheriff's legs.

The audience yelled and howled as the sheriff began springing about.

So did Jerry.

Making a comical face, he jumped over the rope upon the bleachers, closely pursued by the sheriff, who was using some pretty tall language by this time.

Constable Carker jumped into the ring to help his friend.

»Look out there, you!« roared Wilkington, for he and Lucette were flying around the ring.

This time it might have been serious if Wilkington's horse had not been an old fakir and thoroughly trained.

Wilfred only had to give him the word and the knowing animal made a dive for Constable Carker and got him by the seat of the trousers, lifting the man right off his feet.

Carker yelled murder.

The audience yelled with delight, for Jerry Rickers, standing on the bleachers, was explaining the situation to them.

»Ladies and gentlemen,« shouted Jerry, »are you going to allow this show to be broken* up by a squint-eyed sheriff from Shadonk? Are you -«

Just then the sheriff came on the bleachers and made a grab at Jerry.

»Out, minion of the law!« shouted the clown, snapping his whip and leaping nimbly to one side.

This time the sheriff got the whip over the shoulders.

Before he could lay a hand on Jerry, the nimble clown was up several steps higher, laughing »to beat the band.«

The audience made way for him, and laughed, too—the whole tent was in a roar of laughter now, for besides this Wilkington's horse was running around the ring with Constable Carker in his mouth; the man's legs and arms going in turtle style, while he yelled lustily for help.

»Gentlemen of South River,« bawled Jerry. »Men of South River! Boys of South River! Women of South River, and girls, too! I call upon you, as free and independent subjects of the royal star-spangled banner—oh, you would, would you?«

Snap! Snap!

This time the sheriff got the whip over the head and shoulders, while Jerry sprang like a goat several bleachers higher up, immediately continuing his speech:

»I say, let us organize in defence of our liberties!« he cried. »I say to you, good people of South River, jump in and help us throw out these foreign invaders, and —«

And Jerry did not have to say any more, for jump in the South River boys did.

The sheriff was caught and hustled off the premises.

A mob of men and boys jumped into the ring, ran outside the tent and attacked the posse, who were gathering together the horses and show paraphernalia, preparatory to taking them to Shadonk.

In a moment a free fight was on, and Billy—quiet Billy, who sat with his hands meekly folded—was the boss of it all, for it was he who by a wink had started Jerry going; it was he who, by another wink, had given Wilfred Wilkington the tip, and it was he who had put Constable Carker's trousers out of business, and—why, he did the whole of it. Billy, the Box Boy, was the boss of it all!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ELEPHANT HUNTERS START OUT.

The show people all adored Billy, the Box Boy.

He had only to wink at them to make them understand.

In the fight that followed, the sheriff and his posse were very roughly handled, and in the end they were only too glad to beat a hasty retreat to their barge, and drive out of town.

It wouldn't have been so bad if this had been all.

It wasn't.

The sheriff was not altogether a fool.

The moment he got control of his things, he started off poor Sandy.

Five men took the elephant in charge, and drove him off by the back road, taking Johnson with them.

No one but Billy seemed to realize this until the fight was over.

When they came to look for Sandy, the bad show was gone.

Billy came out with the handcuffs around his wrists, and addressed the crowd.

»Good people, 'm going to take you into my confidence,« he said. »I want you to understand what all this means, and why it is that this attack on the show occurred.«

Now, this was only the beginning of Billy's speech.

He made a rattling address, and he was a good speaker, too.

When he told the story of Mamie Brown and Muselle, he lifted the little girl up so that all could see her; the crowd cheered and cheered, and many voices cried out that it was a shame to return the little girl to Farmer Van Dunk and his shrewish wife, where she would only be beaten again.

Muselle saved the child from being captured, by a very simple method.

Receiving Billy's warning, she hastily threw an old waterproof cloak over her costume and ran with Mamie around to the front entrance to the tent and carried her up among the audience, keeping her there, unrecognized, until all danger had passed.

The crowd cheered and cheered when Muselle told the story of the little waif, but the loudest cheering was when Billy held up his manacled hands and said:

»And now, gentlemen, I have done my best to serve you. Help me to get these bracelets off and help me to get my elephant back, and we will give you a show yet, with which you will be pleased.«

It was a frank appeal, and the good-natured crowd responded promptly.

»I'll snip those handcuffs off for you in short order if you will come down to my shop, boy!« the village blacksmith called out.

»If you want any help to recover your elephant and your money, I am at your service, boy!« a seedy-looking individual in the crowd exclaimed. »I'm a lawyer. My office is in the Union Block; after you get through with the blacksmith, come down and see me.«

Others offered their services, too.

The grocer sung out that they could have all they wanted, on credit.

The butcher and the baker said the something.

It was really very remarkable, but somehow the crowd seemed to have taken a fancy to Billy, and to every one else connected with the bad show.

It was a regular procession which followed the boy to the blacksmith shop, where the handcuffs were promptly removed.

Muselle and Lucette went home with some of the ladies, and, with little Mamie Brown, was invited to remain over night; while the rest of the company paraded about town, making friends for themselves wherever they went. For, heeding Billy's urgent request, they were very moderate in what they did and said.

Meanwhile, Mr. Sloper, the lawyer, undertook to give Billy advice, not in his office but in the open street, in front of the Union Block, where he could be heard by the entire crowd.

The fact was, Mr. Sloper was a little tipsy—his usual condition at that hour of the day.

He made a long-winded speech, in which he advised making a raid on Shadonk and recapturing the elephant.

»It's no use to wait for the workings of the tedious machinery of the law, fellow-citizens!« Lawyer Sloper called out. »I shay, let us be a law unto ourselves! I shay—«

»Get up on the barrel, Sloper, and then we can all hear you!« sung out a voice in the crowd.

»Speech! Speech!« a dozen yelled.

There happened to be an empty barrel in the alley, and some one brought it around.

Sloper mounted it.

He had some difficulty in getting up and he found it rather a shaky rostrum when he did get up; but to speechify just suited the lawyer, and he asked for nothing better than to be given a chance to »fire off his mouth.«

»Ladies and gentleman« Fellow-citizens!« he shouted. »What I want to know is just this: Do we or do we not stand for having our shows broken into and our fun spoiled by those snarling dogs, the Shadonkers? Do we or do we not allow those mangy yaller pups to invade our peaceful borough, and steal elephants? I say, no. Ten thousand times, no! There is the law of individual rights to be respected. Have we no rights that those rascally Shadonkers are bound to respect? Have we no inheritance from our forefathers who fit for freedom in the Revolutionary War that we, their descendants, might be secure in the preservation of them, their rights, for all time to come? I tell you, fellow-citizens, this here is an outrage! I rest my claim on the Constitution of these United States! I stand on a firm foundation -«

Perhaps he thought so, but he made a big mistake, for at the same moment the head of the barrel gave way and down went Sloper into an obscure heap.

As he was somewhat stout, he stuck in the barrel and the boys rolled him all around the square, pretending to get him out.

Billy laughed till his sides ached. And then ascending the steps of Claver's butcher shop, he addressed the crowd in his clear, ringing voice, as follows:

»Friends! For I feel you are all my friends. I want to thank you all for the kindness you have shown me—I don't ask you to take up our cause, but since you are disposed to do so, let us settle the whole matter by saying that if you will give us a place to store our belongings in, I shall be a thousand times obliged. If you can help us to get back our elephant, I shall be under still greater obligations. Let us think up some practical plan and get to work.«

»The only practical plan is to form a company and get over to Shadonk tonight!« called a voice from the crowd.

»That's it!« shouted another. »The elephant is in Shadonk. We want to fetch him back!«

Others made similar remarks.

Once more Billy had started the ball rolling in the right direction.

At ten o'clock that night all the boys of South River, and a good many of the men, too, assembled in the square.

They were armed: with clubs and other formidable weapons, the nature of which will be developed later.

»By Billy's particular request, all guns and pistols were left behind.

At twenty minutes past ten they started over the road to Shadonk.

Billy was in the lead, mounted on a cream-colored pony.

It was the same old story.

Every one seemed to trust the boy.
Billy was the boss of it all.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SOUTH RIVER BOYS COME TO TOWN.

If ever there was a queer-looking procession, it was the crowd which started from South River, along the Shadonk road.

Let us describe it.

First came Tom O'Grady, with his pipes piping away, until the very woods rang with the echo.

Next it was Billy on his cream-Colored horse, and following him, eighteen South River boys, four abreast, all provided with tin horns, which they blew at frequent intervals, without any reference to time or tune, as an accompaniment to Tom's pipes.

Next came Danny Delany and Signor Lafferty, with Wilfred Wilkington on one side of them, and Lawyer Sloper on the other.

All these were mounted on the circus horses, as were the South River boys.

Billy recognized the risk he ran in letting the horses enter the sheriff's territory, but he determined to take chances on it, and here they were.

Behind the circus men and their attorney, they all found difficulty in holding their own in the saddle, came a mob South Riverites, man and boys, many mounted on their own horses, others in old ramshackle wagons, antiquated buggies and other queer vehicles.

»It looked like the famous Coxe procession, as it wound along the road, the pipes piping, the horns blowing, and the crowd shouting itself hoarse.

»We'll get there! We'll get there!« they kept calling out in chorus, and then they began »John Brown's Body,« »Marching Through Georgia,« and other old-time songs, for nothing new in the musical line, or in any other line in fact, finds its way into this part of Jersey oftener than once in fifty years.

They made things pretty lively as they went along, and as everybody was in good humor and enjoying themselves immensely, it was probably about as jolly a crowd as ever passed over the road between South River and Shadonk.

As they drew near that now famous jay town which had caused so much trouble to the »greatest show in the world.« Billy gave orders to have all noise stopped and called up Buck Brandon, a big, brawny young Jerseyman, who seemed to be a leader among the South River boys.

»I suppose you know Shadonk pretty well?« he asked, as Buck came up alongside.

»Waal, I think I orter,« was the reply. »If I don't, I don't know who does.'«

»Where do you think Be would be most likely to put the elephant? It would be the best thing for us if we could go right to the place where it is.

»Waal, I dunno,« drawled Buck. »Thar's the old pound up 'longside ther pound.

»That's right, Bucky!« called out one of the boys behind. »Thet's jest where they'll take him, you bet.«

»What part of the town is this pond located?« asked Billy. »I don't remember seeing it.«

»Oh, it's back-way back half a mile or more.«

»And how do we get to it? Have we got to pass through the town?«

»Waal, thar hain't no other way.«

»That's what I was thinking. We have got to be mighty quiet about it unless we want to spoil it all. Pass the word, Buck. We want the elephant and we don't want to give ourselves away.«

»Dunno about that,« drawled Buck. »Thar's one thing to be considered, and that's about us boys. We are just spoiling for a fight with the Shadonkers. You needn't think it's all on your account that we have come along.«

»That's all right!« laughed Billy. »I don't object one bit to your having your fight, but we want our elephant, that's all.«

»You shall have him,« replied Buck, and he rode back and passed the word to the boys.

The procession struck the town just as the bell in the Methodist church steeple rang out the midnight hour.

Everything was tight shut, and not a soul was to be seen as they marched down Main Street.

Of course, however, the tramp of horses' feet could not be disguised, and many windows were opened and heads came out to see who had come to town.

Down by Myrtle Street they ran into the night watchman.

This was the first bit of opposition.

The watchman was a crusty old fellow, who always made a practice of insisting on his rights, in season and out.

He ran out into the middle of Main Street, waving his lantern and shaking his big, hook-handled cane which he always carried.

»Who have we here? Who have we here?« he cried. »Where are all you people going, at this time of night?«

»Halt!« cried Billy, and others passed the word.

»Who are you, and what right have you to interfere with us?« Billy demanded of the man.

»Well, I guess I' m the watchman!« was the reply.

»And I guess we are peaceable citizens and have a right to pass over a public road at any time, day or night,« said Billy. »Mr. Sloper, how is that?«

»Of course we have a right!« cried the lawyer. »This fellow -«

»Hold on, Jim Sloper!« shouted the watchman. »Don't you call me a fellow! I know you, and you ought to know me, seeing that it was I who arrested you last time you came over here on a drunk!«

»Out upon you for a cantankerous old snoozer!« bawled the lawyer. »I know ye not; but we will precious soon make your acquaintance if you attempt to interfere with our march.«

»Time!« cried Wilfred Wilkington.

»Get on, Billy!« shouted a dozen of the South River boys in a breath.

Now, Billy had his suspicions and that was why he halted as he did.

Still there seemed nothing to do but to yield to the wishes of the majority.

»Forward! March!« he cried. Adding:

»Out of the way, uncle, or we'll run you down!«

»You are after that elephant, and you don't get it!« shouted the watchman, jumping aside. jumping aside.

He had an old-fashioned rattle, and he sounded it, vigorously.

»We are up against trouble, boys! shouted Billy. »Pipe up! Blow away! Let 'em know we are here!«

Then Tom, with his pipes, and South River boys with their fish-horns, set up a dreadful din.

It was just as Billy expected.

The procession had not gone ten yards before a big mob of Shadonkers came wheeling around the corner of Myrtle Street, making the still, night air ring with their shouts.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BATTLE OF SKADONK.

Of course, there had been a spy in the crowd that gathered in South River after the repulse of the sheriff.

Of course, said spy had hurried over to Skadonk and given the snap away.

But the South River boys had the big end of the stick, most decidedly, for they were mounted, whereas the Skadonkites were not.

»Charge!« cried Billy. »Let no one interfere with our progress now!«

»Halt, you!« cried, the leader of the Skadonkers. »We don't allow night stragglers here!«

There were at least fifty of the South River boys, and as many as a hundred of the Skadonkers were gathered to oppose them; these came rushing out of Myrtle Street into Main, a wild, disorderly mob, hooting and yelling and, threatening all sorts of dreadful things if the intruders did not turn back.

»We don't turn back!« shouted Jim Sloper. »We are not that kind of a crowd, and that may as well be understood!«

»What do you want here, may I ask?« demanded Constable Carker, separating himself from the mob. »You are supposed to be our neighbors, but I for one regard this as rather an unneighborly piece of business, for you to put yourselves under the leadership of that boy, who is nothing but a kidnapper and a criminal, and invade our town at midnight. I demand that you give up the boy, Jim Sloper, if you call yourself the head of that mob!«

»Mob yourself!« roared Sloper. »Who came busting into South River this afternoon and spoiling our show? We want the elephant, and we mean to have him—quietly, if we can; forcibly, if we must! Trot him out, if you know when you are well off!«

»Do you. think I carry elephants in my coat-tail pocket?« cried Carker. »You're a drunken snoozer, that's what you are!«

»That's enough!« shouted Billy. »Charge, boys! Let 'em have it! Follow me to the pound!«

Then Tom began piping for all he was worth, and Tom was the boy who could bestride a horse's back and still work his pipes to the queen's taste.

There was no fish-horn accompaniment, however.

The South River boys had something else to do.

Each carried a bag beside his saddle, and in every bag was something quite as formidable as the stones the Skadonk boys began to throw.

Tomatoes!

They grew them and they canned them at South River, but fate had willed that the tomatoes which filled the bags should never be canned.

Fifty of them flew through the air, landing on the faces of the Skadonkers for the most part.

Immediately they were transformed into Squashes.

It was spat! Splash! Smack!

Everywhere a tomato hit it left its mark, and as they let them fly the South River boys urged their horses on.

Another volley of stones came flying.

A volley of tomatoes was the answer.

As the Skadonkers separated—they had to get out from under the feet of the horses—the boys in front drew their clubs and brought them whacking down upon the heads of the enemy, while the air resounded with shouts and wild cries.

»Charge! Charge! Charge!« shouted Billy, and he dug his heels into the flanks of the white mare.

The mare understood her business, and went dashing through such of the crowd who still ventured to face them.

The others pressed close behind the Box Boy.

The battle of Skadonk had been fought and won.

The South River boys made a flying run down the street, followed, it is true, by a shower of stones: but to this they paid no heed.

Soon they reached the pound, where they were stopped by a guard of three men, armed with revolvers, who demanded to know their business, as they approached the gate.

»We are after that elephant!« cried Billy, boldly. »We want you to open the gate.«

»You will have to wait, then,« replied one of the men, »for we don't open the gate for any one!«

»Let her go, beys!« shouted Billy.

It had all been arranged beforehand.

Wilfred Wilkington was a splendid hand at the lasso, and, as it happened, Delany and Lafferty had been taking lessons of him and were almost as good.

They had provided three lassoes in case they were needed, and as they approached the gate and the three men showed themselves, Billy gave them the tip to be ready for business.

Tom was piping and the fish-horns were blowing again when the lassoes flew through the air.

Wilkington got his man and so did Delany, but Lafferty missed his.

There was a grand dismounting then, and the boys, led by Billy, made a rush for the gate of the pound.

To break it in was an easy matter, and there on the other side was Johnson, with Sandy, all ready.

»Hooray!« yelled the great professor from London.

»I know'd you would come, Billy, so I done got Sandy all ready. Fo' de Lawd, I couldn't help gwine with him. Course, I couldn't leave him go alone.«

»You were quite right, Johnson,« replied Billy, and then he whispered something in the keeper's ear.

»Dat am all right, Billy,« replied Johnson, showing his teeth. »You can count on me and Sandy, every time.«

»Right about face!« shouted Billy. »We have got what we want, now. Back to South River. Tom, pipe up! We'll show these Skadonkers that we know our business, if they don't believe it yet!«

»They're a-coming!« cried Buck, get the stones this time, sure!«

»We won't give them the chance!« said Billy. »Mount, boys! We'll show them! If they want a second edition of the battle of Skadonk we'll give them their fill.«

Johnson got astride Sandy's neck, with one leap, and put himself in front of the procession.

»Lay to the sides of the road, boys!« cried Billy. »Let them get in between us and we will give them fits!«

This was a wise move.

The Skadonkers, chagrined at their late defeat, and urged on by Constable Carker, who, acting for the sheriff, was enraged to see that the elephant had been captured, having supplied themselves with a fresh supply of stones, and not a few stout clubs as well, came charging, down the street.

The South River boys, separating, let them come on, dodging the stones as best they could.

Meanwhile, Johnson urged Sandy forward.

The Skadonkers did not feel one bit afraid of the elephant.

Sandy had one of his good-natured fits on him when he was brought into town in the early evening, and Johnson had made lots of fun with him, and took in a hatful of nickels from the admiring crowd.

But if that same crowd expected Sandy to show the same gentle spirit on this occasion, they were very much mistaken; for the elephant was a perfect weather vane, and Johnson knew just how to make said vane turn.

The words he suddenly shouted out to Sandy were understood by no one except the elephant and himself.

Sandy knew his business, however.

»Charge! Sweep 'em off the street!« yelled Billy.

Then as the stones flew, the tomatoes flew also, and the clubs did their part, while Sandy stampeded the Skadonkers by pushing into their midst and whacking them with his trunk, right and left.

The battle of Skadonk was on again and the South River boys had all the advantage, just as they did before.

CHAPTER XVII.

DODGING AROUND.

Billy continued to boss the battle until he brought it to a successful finish, and the show people and the South-River boys rode out of town in triumph, taking the elephant with them, for the Skadonkers had given it up and now no one was inclined to interfere.

it was a jolly crowd which rode into South River early that morning.

The hotel-keeper opened up to them and started off by giving one round of drinks on the house.«

This was the first, and before they got to the last a good many were put out of business.

Billy, however, had nothing to do with all this.

He and Johnson, having taken the elephant to the place prepared for him, both wrapped themselves in blankets and stretched themselves upon the ground for a little sleep.

Billy kept the show two days in South River, and took nearly seventy-five dollars out of the town when he left.

Nothing was heard from the managers.

Neither did the:sheriff put in-an appearance or even Constable Carker.

Billy learned that the sheriff dislocated his arm during the fracas in the tent, and that was the reason why he did not put in an appearance at the battle of Skadonk.

Finding himself entirely unmolested and with a little money in his pocket, Billy now determined to push on to Broomfield, the next town at which they were billed.

The boy boss of this very bad show now adopted different tactics.

It was very evident that the owners of the show had not the faintest intention of coming back again at present, so Billy divided the cash around among all hands, keeping back just enough to get feed for the live stock and themselves.

It was a beautiful morning on which the company started for Broomfield, which was a sizable town down among the cranberry marshes, nearer the coast.

The South River people were really sorry to see them go, and many a small boy was up early to see the last of the elephant, and there were rousing cheers as Sandy shuffled along over the dusty road.

»It's strange that the sheriff dropped on that business, Billy,« remarked Mr. Ryan, as they rode me Side by side. »For my part I don't understand it at all.«

»I think we shall soon know more about it,« replied Billy. »I don't look for plain sailing; on the contrary, I fully expect trouble as soon as we strike Broomfield.«

»I was thinking about that,« said Ryan »Of course, they know where we are billed for.«

»Certainly.«

»I don't doubt that they have fixed up a job to capture us as soon as we strike the town.«

»Just my idea. Why not somebody ride ahead and see how the land lies?«

»You better not go, Billy.«

»And why not?«

»Because you are practically an escaped prisoner. They, will know you instantly and scoop you in.«

»Well, now I'm going to take my chances on that very thing,« replied Billy. »I've got the road all marked out, and I'm going to take a short cut through the woods just as soon as we come to it, and make a run over to Broomfield and see how the cat jumps. They shan't capture me, Ryan, and I'll be back in time to warn everybody if there is any danger of them capturing Sandy or making trouble for us in any way.«

This plan Billy carried out.

But as every member of the company insisted that he should not go alone, he took Jerry Rickers, the clown, with him.

They went dashing through the woods on their horses, regardless of the underbrush, coming out upon the road again near a deep creek, which was crossed by a rickety old bridge.

»Hold on, Jerry!« exclaimed Billy. »Sandy can never cross that bridge.«

»Never in the wide world, Billy. It's a good job we got on to it, if nothing else comes out of this dash.«

»He'll have to ford the creek.«

»That brings us up against the question of how deep it is.«

It was serious business, of course, so Billy and the clown started in to investigate; but before they could get down the bank, after they tied their horses, Jerry caught Billy by the arm and pulled him back.

»I see it!« breathed Billy.

»Tramps?«

»Perhaps.«

»They have a fire there under the bridge! Who else can it be?«

It was a faint column of smoke which had attracted their attention. :

The night had turned off rather cold; for any one sitting around by the stream a fire would not come amiss.

»Wait here, Jerry,« whispered Billy to the clown, and he crept down the bank and made his way through the bushes until he could look under the bridge.

There was no one under the bridge, but just beyond it, among some rocks, Billy could see two men bending over a fire.

They seemed to be heating coffee in a tin pail, but they were entirely too well dressed for tramps.

Looking closer, Billy felt sure that he had seen one of the men in Skadonk.

Just then the man took the pail off the fire and called out:

»All ready, boys!«

There was a movement among the rocks, and others came out into view.

Billy counted twenty men altogether, and with them was Constable Carker.

This was enough, of course.

Billy got back to where he had left Jerry Rickers, just as quick as he could.

»Well,« said Jerry, »what's up?«

»We are up the spout if we don't take care.«

»The same old growl,« said Jerry.

»That's what. It's the constable and the Skadonkers. They are there, twenty Strong.«

»Laying for us, of course.«

»Certainly. They think we have got to come this way, and they are simply waiting to scoop us in.«

They mounted and rode back to the show, as fast as possible.

On the way they stopped at a farmhouse and inquired particularly about the roads to Broomfield.

There was another way of getting to the town, as Billy had supposed. In order to get to this road one had to pass over a strip of cranberry marsh, cross the creek and then striking on through the marsh for about half a mile, to take another road which led straight to the town.

A council of war was held and it was coated to try this a of getting into Broomfield, and so give the watchers under the bridge the slip.

Once in the town, Billy had determined 'to apply to a county judge, who resided there, for an injunction prohibiting any one from interfering with the show until the owners returned.

This matter had been partly arranged by Lawyer Sloper of South River, who had telephoned the judge, with whom he was acquainted, getting his promise to grant

the injunction when the show came to town.

Thus Billy felt that if he could only get into Broomfield everything would be all right, which made him all the more anxious to dodge the party at the bridge.

But to move a show—even as bad a one as Billy Hunt was bossing—is a slow and tedious matter.

There was always the chance that the enemy was watching them, and might pounce down upon them at any time.

For that reason Billy, with Johnson and Jerry Rickers, took Sandy and started off ahead.

Wilfred Wilkington, with four or five horses, went with them and they made good time to the point where they were to turn off upon the cranberry marsh.

Here they paused to let Sandy decide what was to be done next.

This was quite necessary.

-Elephants always know their business, or are supposed to.

While the farmer who gave Billy points on the road assured him that the trail across the marsh was perfectly safe for the horses, he would not guarantee that it would bear an elephant.

Johnson ran ahead and examined it a part of the way, and, coming back, reported that it was all right.

Still the decision must rest with Sandy, and the way they took to get at it was to start. Wilkington ahead with the horses.

Billy and Jerry Rickers, on their horses, followed.

Johnson sprang upon Sandy's neck and sat there without making a move.

Would the elephant take the path?

This remained to be seen, and Mr. Sandy seemed to be in no hurry to decide, for he stood there, tossing his trunk, as much as to say:

»You fellows can go dodging around as long as you like, but I don't know whether it is safe for me or not!«

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ACCIDENT AT THE BRIDGE.

»Come on, Sandy!« shouted Billy. »Come on!«

»Let him take his time, Billy,« said Johnson. »You may be able to boss this bad show of ours, but I'll be blamed if you or any other man can boss Sandy in a case like this.«

After a while Sandy made up his mind.

First he would raise one foot and then the other, but he always put them down in the same place until suddenly he started off on the meadows with a slow and cautious tread.

»Bully for Sandy!« shouted Wilkington. »He'll go all right now, Billy. You may as well come on.«

»How is it, Johnson?« called Billy.

»He'll go,« replied Johnson, »and I think you will find that he has made no mistake.«

The keeper was right.

Although the trail was pretty soft in some places, and the elephant sank in to his hocks, he was always able to pull his feet out again and he put it through, all right, to the bridge which spanned the creek.

Here they all halted.

The creek was very full. It was really nothing but an arm of the ocean which could be seen in the distance, beyond a long line of white rollers breaking on the beach.

It was ebb tide, too, and the water was rushing rapidly along the creek which soon, no doubt, would be shallow enough.

»Well,« Billy called to Wilkington, »what's the trouble, now? Why don't you go on?«

»Why, look at the bridge!« replied Wilkington. »It might bear the horses, although I doubt it; but it never would bear the elephant. You can see that for yourself.«

Instead of answering, Billy rode the cream-colored pony across.

The bridge was old and shaky, and trembled even under the pony's weight.

»I don't know about it!« he exclaimed, turning and riding back again. »It certainly does seem to be in pretty bad shape.«

»It won't bear Sandy, that's a sure thing,« said Johnson, »but I think you might get the horses across.

While they were talking about it a stylish road wagon, drawn by a handsome span of coal-black horses, was seen coming toward them over the marsh.

»Hold on till this fellow gets across,« said Billy. »We'll see how the bridge stands up under him.«

On came the stranger at a rapid pace.

As he drew near, Billy saw that he was a very peculiar and striking person.

A very large man, considerably over six feet high with an enormous head of snow-white hair and a white mustache, while his face was that of a man by no means old.

»Say, he's a big fellow, isn't he?« Billy exclaimed.

»Yes, and a dandy team he has got, too,« added Jerry, the clown.

»He's rattling right ahead!« said Wilkington. »There isn't any doubt that he means to cross. I reckon he knows the road, and the bridge is stronger than it looks.

Perhaps the stranger did know the road, but it soon became evident that he knew nothing about the bridge, for as he drew near he reined in and shouted:

»Hello, there! Will the bridge bear my team, friends?«

»That's just what we don't know,« replied Billy. »We are afraid to try the elephant on it ourselves.«

»Ha! I should say you wanted to be careful,« replied the stranger. »Elephants don't breed very thick about here. Where did you get the beast?«

»We are part of a show,« replied Billy. »We are heading for Broomfield.«

»Where are you from?«

»From South River, last.«

»I'm going to Skadonk myself. This used to be considered the short cut to South River years ago, when I lived in these parts. The bridge was all right then, but it seems to be rather shaky now.«

»That's what it is, mister,« said Wilkington. »I don't know whether to advise you. to try it or not.«

»Well, I don't want any advice,« replied the stranger. »I'm a man capable of judging for myself. If one of you fellows will be good enough to come over here and hold my horses for me I'll soon decide.«

Jerry went over and the stranger examined the bridge.

»The underpinning is rotten, and it certainly won't hold the elephant,« he replied; »but I think it will bear my team, all right, and I should think your horses might cross safe enough, too.«

»That what I was thinking,« said Billy. »I guess you are right. We will have to wait for lower water and then ford the Elephant. It won't be long.

The stranger jumped in his buggy and started the team.

»Move the elephant a little over, friend!« he shouted to Johnson. »My horses may shy at him a bit, but I can hold them, All I want is elbow room.«

This was what the stranger thought, but right there he was mistaken. He wanted a more secure foundation to hold his team, for no sooner had the horses struck the middle of the bridge than the whole crazy structure gave way under them.

»Look out! It's going!« yelled the clown, as though the unfortunate stranger could do anything to save himself.

Before the words were fairly out of Jerry's mouth the horses were floundering in the water, while the stranger had disappeared.

»Help him! Help him!« cried Billy. »Don't stop to talk!«

»Jerry, you stand by the horses!« yelled Wilkington. »I can save that team, I think!«

If Wilkington could not save the team, nobody could, for the bareback man was most expert in everything connected with horses.

But who was to save the stranger?

He came up to the surface and was seen wildly struggling.

»Help me! Help me!« he shouted, »I can't do a thing to help myself. I can't swim a stroke!«

CHAPTER XIX.

RESCUED BY SANDY.

Billy ran down along the creek.

It was a question if any one could do anything for the stranger.

The water was running like a mill-race and the creek, although by no means wide, was very deep.

Billy was a pretty fair swimmer himself, but then this man was a perfect giant and he did not see what he could do to help him.

No doubt the stranger would have been swept out of existence in a hurry if he had not by rare good luck managed to seize hold of a low-growing bush on a little muddy islet in the middle of the stream.

The islet was entirely under water and offered no foothold, but fortunately the bush was strong enough to bear his weight.

»Gracious!« cried Jerry, »What in the world are you going to do, now?«

»How about the team?« yelled the stranger. »I'm lost if they come up against me! Help me! Save me and I'll pay you well!«

Wilkinson was at work, and, as we mentioned before, he understood his business, too.

He had made one leap into the creek, landing on the back of the near horse.

This was the time Wilfred Wilkinson showed that when he was in shape to attend to his business he knew Just what he was about.

Standing on the back of the horse, he cut the pole straps and let the buggy sink which it promptly did.

Then still standing on the horse he got hold of the reins and was whirled down the creek past the bush to which the stranger clung, and so on toward the sea.

»Look out for the man, fellers!« he shouted, as he went past. »I can attend to the horses! I'll get them out all right!«

»If you do, and I live, it's a hundred dollars in your pocket, my friend!« the stranger shouted back.

»You'll live!« said Billy from the shore. »I'm going to get you out!«

»How can you do it?« was the answer. »There isn't one of you who can help me, I'm so big and heavy.«

»Don't fret! There's one of us here who is bigger and heavier than you.«

»Which one? I don't see it.«

»Sandy!. Bring Sandy down, Johnson!« shouted Billy. »He can reach him, I'm sure!«

»Oh the Elephant!« exclaimed the Stranger. »No, thank you, young man!«

»He can do it, sir. Sandy is under perfect control.«

»Well, then, let him try it,« said the man. »I've had worse things happen to me. I shall soon be dead if it isn't done«

Johnson brought Sandy down to the bank of the creek.

It was comical to see how gingerly the elephant approached the water's edge.

He seemed to fully understand the risk he ran and the danger of caving in.

Johnson kept talking to him just as though he had been a human being, using some sort of gibberish that nobody could understand.

»He'll have to be quick,« said Billy at last; »the man can't hold out much longer, I'm afraid.«

»That's what!« said the stranger. »This water is Sweeping my strength all away.«

»You can't hurry Sandy,« said Johnson. »He'll tell me in a minute whether he'll do it or not.«

Just as he spoke, Sandy thrust his trunk out toward the man, who involuntarily drew back.

»Don't do that! Don't let him think you are afraid of him!« shouted Johnson. »He's only six inches from it. He will make it, all right, though.«

Very cautiously Sandy took another step or two forward.

He was close to the edge of the creek now, and he kept dancing up and down, evidently making sure that it would bear him, and then, all at once, his trunk went flying out toward the bush and before the stranger knew where he was at the elephant had him firmly around the waist and drew him in, laying him down on the muddy bank as gently as possible, and then backing away.

»Hooray for Sandy!« Billy shouted, running to help the stranger up.

Johnson caught the elephant by the end of the trunk, and Sandy squirmed it around over his face, the keeper scratching it all the while.

»By Jove! the elephant has saved me!« cried the stranger. »Here you are, boys! I pay as I go! Here's fifty dollars apiece, all around!«

He pulled out a big roll of bills and handed over the money, at the same time announcing that his name was Brown, and that he had just come up from Buenos Ayres, South America.

Meanwhile, Wilkington had landed the horses away down the creek, and was coming back with them on a brisk trot.

»It's mighty lucky that I fell in with you fellows,« said Mr. Brown. »I should be dead now if I hadn't, that's one sure thing. You see, I haven't been in this part of the country in many years. I belong here, though, and now I'm back again with a good, fat pile, to look up my daughter and her child and take them back to South America with me. They live over at Skadonk, or did, last accounts.«

Mr. Brown had proceeded thus far with his story when Sandy put his trunk into his coat pocket and made him jump back with a start.

»Sandy wants his pay,« said Johnson.

»Apples, oranges. I'm sorry I haven't anything of that kind,« the stranger replied.

»Apples and oranges, nothing!« said Johnson. »What Sandy wants is a drink.«

»What will he drink?« asked Mr. Brown, laughing.

»Anything there is going.«

»I've got a flask of whisky here. There's as much as a pint in it.«

»It won't phase him a bit. Try him!« exclaimed Johnson.

He would have accepted Mr. Brown's pressing invitation to have a drop, if Billy had not given him a warning glance.

Mr. Brown took a nip himself and then handed Sandy the flask, laughing heartily to see the elephant empty the liquor down his capacious throat and return the flask with a polite bow.

»Sandy is a great old boy, and I want to know more about him, and about you all,« said Mr. Brown. »Probably you don't know that I'm in the show business myself, down in South America. I own six elephants, but none as small as this.«

Here was great news.

Billy began to think that he had found a friend.

Just then Wilkinson came rattling up at the horses.

»There you are, boss!« he exclaimed. I'm sorry I couldn't save your buggy, but that was a bit too much for me. I think you will find the horses all right.«

»Many thanks; and I think you will find this all right,« replied Mr. Brown, producing his roll and handing Wilfred a hundred dollars.

The poor fellow almost dropped dead, for he had not seen so much in three months.

He then began to question Billy all about the show, and the boy made a clean breast of it and told the whole story of the hard time they had been having.

While they were standing there talking and waiting for the rest of the company to come up, the tide ran itself out and the creek was nothing but a mass of mud when they began to think of crossing.

Wilmington led them down to the place where he had landed the horses.

There was no trouble in getting across here, even for Sandy.

Mr. Brown, who proved to be the manager of a large circus in South America, decided to go back to Broomfield and get another buggy.

So Billy loaned him a saddle, and they all rode on until the show town was reached.

Everybody liked the South American manager.

»I shall see you again, young man,« he said to Billy, when he was about to start. »Very likely to-morrow. You and i must have a little further talk.

»I don't like that man, Billy«, said Muselle, after he had departed. »For my part I hope we never see him again.«

»Why?« asked Billy.

»I don't know,« was the reply. »I guess it's because he never took his eyes off of little Mamie. I believe he is a spy. I believe he is in the plot to get the child away from me, but he never a will!«

CHAPTER XX.

STANDING UP AGAINST THE CROWD.

How long the constable's crowd remained waiting for the bad show, under the bridge, Billy never had any means of knowing; but, at all events, they did not come into Broomfield until away along into the afternoon, when the matinee was almost at its close.

Signor La Fitte was doing his fire-eating act, then, and Billy was in the box waiting for this very thing to happen, when Constable Carker, with twenty men behind him, came marching up to the tent.

»Hello, young man!« sang out the constable. »So you are there, are you? How did you get into town?«

»Well, I don't know where else I should be, seeing that I'm the Box Boy,« retorted Billy. »As to how we got here I beg leave to inform you, sir, that it's none of your business.«

»Oh, indeed!« said Mr. Carker, sarcastically. »Well, let me inform you then that it's very much my business, as you will very soon find out. Come out of that now. Turn over the cash to me. This show is in my charge, now.«

»Oh, that's it?« said Billy. »You're not arresting me for kidnapping, this trip, appears.«

»No,« said the constable. Dunk seems to have dropped on that. Anyhow, I have no orders to take you in I'm acting for the sheriff this time; the show has been attached and you have got to give it up, that's all. You have been served with papers once, so it isn't necessary to do it again.«

»No,« sneered Billy, »not necessary at all; but here's a paper I was told to serve on you.«

Thus saying, Billy thrust a copy the judge's injunction out at the constable, who drew back and let it fall on the ground.

At first, Constable Carker refused to take it, but presently he thought better of this and picked it up.

»By thunder, you get the best of me every time, boy!« he exclaimed.

»Well, that's what I am here for,« said Billy, triumphantly. »What do you propose to do about it, Mr. Man?«

»It isn't worth the paper it's written upon!« snarled the constable, making a motion as though he would teny the junction up. »

»Look out what you are von there!« cried Billy. »That's contempt of court, and many a man has gone to State's prison for it, as perhaps you know.«

The warning had its effect.

The constable drew away and consulted with his men.

While they were still talking the audience began to come out of the tent.

They were laughing and telling other that the show was no good, that they hadn't got their money's worth, and all that sort of thing.

»That's what, gentlemen!« cried the constable, maliciously. »The show is a rotten fake. I wouldn't stand being humbugged so, if I was you!«

»We won't!« cried a voice.

»Get square with the fakirs! Pull the tent down!« shouted the constable, louder then before.

The other voices joined his.

The twenty men who had come over from Skadonk with the constable, mingled with the crowd, which grew larger every minute, as the people came flocking out of the tent, and all had something to say.

»They mean mischief!« thought Billy.

»I must warn the boys. There will be an attack on the tent, first thing I know.«

He slipped out of the box by the rear and passed into the tent.

»Rayn!« he called. »Where are you, Rayn?«

»Here I am, Billy!« replied the Ringmaster. »What's wanted? What's all that row about outside?« Billy explained.

»Tell Muselle to get out of the way with the child,« he added. »Let the canvas man be all ready to drop the tent on them if they come in.«

»They will tear it all to pieces, Billy. They pretty nearly ruined it last time it came down.«

»I can't help it; something has got to be done. Get the boys around on the outside. Let them all get horsewhips. Send Jerry over to the store across the street for a dozen. Let Johnson run Sandy off on the lot. I am going to look about the horses. Fly around lively, now, Ryan, if you please!«

Billy, the Box Boy, bright fellow that he was, had seen through the constable's trick. If a row, followed by a free fight, could only be brought about, he, as representing the writ of attachment on the property of the show, could force the judge to place the said property in care of a keeper, whose business it would be to see that it was preserved.

This would settle the case as far as the company was concerned, for with the show put out of business there would be nothing for them to do but to light out and go their several ways.

Jerry was as quick to get the horse-whips as Muselle was to slip across to the hotel with little Mamie Brown.

Now it must be mentioned right here that Miss Malognio—otherwise Maloney—was perhaps the most thrifty and levelheaded of all the performers in Billy's bad show.

Muselle was not »busted,« by any means.

The sweet singer of ballads had a nice little nest egg laid away, and she was getting heartily sick of this life on the road.

Moreover, Muselle had come to fairly worship little Mamie from whom she swore She would never part.

»For some time Miss Malognio had been contemplating »flying the coop,« as she expressed it, and when she took refuge in the hotel with the child that afternoon, she made up her mind that the time had come.

What grew out of this determination on the part of Miss Malognio we shall see later on.

Back with the horsewhips Jerry came flying, and all the company got one, posting themselves in the green room by the horses, anywhere and everywhere, so long as they could not be seen from the inside of the tent, and while these arrangements were being made, Johnson was quietly leading Sandy across lots to a piece of woods behind the tent.

Meanwhile, on the outside of the tent the constable and his gang were still working up the crowd.

It has taken time to explain all this—more time, actually, than Billy took to start the ball rolling, and when at last, urged on by the constable, the crowd came rushing into the tent ready to revenge themselves upon the bad show, Billy was there, calmly waiting for them, near the tent pole—and all alone.

»Well, gentlemen, what do you want here?« he called out, »Show is all over. What brings you back in the tent?«

The crowd halted.

Actually, they felt a little ashamed of themselves when they saw the boy manager stand up against them so bravely.

»We want our money's worth!« a big, bull-headed fellow shouted out. »We've been swindled by this here show!«

»That's right!«

'You're a lot of fakirs!«

»The whole business is a humbug!«

»Give me back my quarter!«

»Sail in, fellows, and clean 'em out!«

These and many similar cries rang out through the tent.

»Well, I am 'here!« said Billy, as cool as a cucumber. »I'm the boss of this bad show. Come on! You're a hundred to one! What are you waiting for? Why don't you clean me out?«

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FIGHT IN THE TENT.

Still the crowd did not press forward.

Billy's calm speech and determined manner seemed to hold them in check.

»Are you going to give us back our money, young fellow?« demanded the big rough. »You want to decide blame quick. 'We are going to clean you out if we don't get our money back!«

»You said that before,« replied Billy, steadily. »Might I ask what money you want back? I remember your face very well, my good friend. You threw around small bills for us and were paid for it, but you didn't pay one cent to come into the show.«

There was a general laugh at this.

Seeing the crowd was getting into good humor, Billy tried them again.

»You have no right to expect any more for a quarter than you got!« he cried. »You have seen good bareback riding, you have seen the trained elephant which alone is worth the price of admission. I say——«

»Don't listen to him, boys! bawled one of the constable's henchmen. »Drop the tent on him! Clean him out right now!«

Billy had reached the end of his rope and he knew it.

The rush came right then.

The boss of the show was ready for it.

He gave a whistle as the rush came.

This brought the performers and canvas-men in with their horsewhips, and Billy seized one, too.

»At 'em, boys! at 'em! Drive 'em back!« he »yelled.

»Snap! Snap!« went the whips, and the circus boys charged into the crowd.

A free fight was on in the tent.

The din was dreadful.

Urged on by the constable's gang the Broomfieldians charged on the tent pole.

The show crowd never budged one inch.

»Stand your ground like men!« shouted Billy, and, keeping their whips going, they bravely held the pole.

It was good that no one seemed disposed to shoot.

Clubs and stones were the weapons of the mob.

They got the whips over their heads and shoulders and many a one of them had good cause to remember that day.

»Then finding that they could not make the pole, they shouted to those on the outside of the tent to pass the stones.

This was done, and in a few moments they came flying in a perfect volley.

Lafferty. was hit and badly bruised, and so was Danny and several of the canvas-men, who were knocked out altogether.

»We will have to give it up, boys!« cried Billy. »It's twenty to one against us. The odds are too big, altogether. We had better retreat while we can!«

They made a rush out the back way, then, and in one minute the mob had the tent down.

There was a great hurraing and shouting as the mob made its way out from under the fallen canvas.

They were a vindictive lot, too, and seemed disposed to do all the mischief they could.

So they attacked the tent with knives and cut it all to pieces.

It never went up again, for it was utterly ruined when they got through.

Meanwhile the wily Carker mustered his forces behind the small tents.

The constable had no notion of disobeying the injunction, but he was determined to capture the show and hold it in Broomfield, while he went for the sheriff and consulted him how to act next.

Dispatching some of his men up into the grove to capture Sandy and take him into the public square, to be held there until he could see the judge and arrange matters, Carker set others at work on the horses, while he and three to help him laid for Billy when he came out.

Billy never suspected. If he had he would have taken an opportunity to slip out some other way.

The moment he put his nose outside the small tent he was seized and his hands tied securely behind him.

»Run him up into the woods, boys!« ordered the constable. »Hold him there until I come!«

They gagged poor Billy as well as tying him, and before any one was aware of his capture the men ran him across lots to the woods, where they threw him down upon the ground, and, lighting their pipes, sat guarding him until long after sundown.

It was a miserable position for Billy, a most despairing end of all his fine plans.

The Box Boy had put up a brave fight against the biggest kind of odds, and now it seemed to be all over, and he had come out at the little end of the horn.

Down in the village it had all grown still, and as he lay there he could see the twinkling lights appearing in the windows, one by one.

The men who sat guarding him were perfect Sphinxes, and to all the appealing glances he threw at them, begging them to take the gag out of his mouth, they paid no attention at all.

It grew darker and darker—Billy was beginning to wonder where it was all going to end, when at last he heard the sound of wagon wheels on the road which ran through the woods at some distance away.

»The boss is coming at last, Bill!« exclaimed one of the men, springing up.

»That's what!« growled Bill. »And it's about time, I should say. Give the call. He may not know just exactly where we are.«

The man gave a shrill whistle, then, and the answer came from the road.

»Are you there, boys?« Constable Carker's voice was heard shouting a few moments later on.

»That's what!« replied Bill. »We thought you were never coming, boss.«

»Well, I'm here,« was the reply, »and everything is ready. Bring him along.«

Billy was helped to his feet, and they met the constable at the edge of the woods.

»You can take out the gag now,« said Carker. »I don't think the boy is fool enough to do any hollering. I mean to shoot him if he does.«

Billy did not believe the threat, of course.

He was so relieved to have the gag out of his mouth that he scarcely gave it a thought.

»Well, you young snoozer, I've captured you at last,« he said. »You've made things hum while you lasted, but it's all over now. I've not only got you, but I have broken the injunction and have got the whole show!«

Billy made no answer.

There was really no chance to speak, for they hustled him over to the road without ceremony, tumbled him into a wagon and drove away.

CHAPTER XXII.

CAPTURED AT LAST.

Billy was about used up with it all.

As he sat on the rear seat of the wagon, between two of his captors he just felt as though he did not care to fight this unequal fight any longer.

»Let them take the show and the elephant, too,« he said to himself. »I can't and won't stand up against them any more. So much for trying to do one's level best. I suppose they will send me to jail for what I have done. The best thing would have been to run away at the start.«

While Billy was thinking thus, the constable began to talk something which he had not been inclined to do as yet.

»Well, young feller,« Mr. Carker began, »here you are up against it at last! Now what do you think of it all?«

»What's the use of asking me that question?« replied Billy. »P've got nothing to say.«

»Oh, I suppose not. I have some questions to ask you, though.«

»Well, why don't you ask them, then?« grunted Billy. »What are you beating about the bush for?«

»Of course, you know what about.«

»How should I know? I'm no mind-reader.«

»Don't be sassy, boy. You have made me trouble enough.«

»Well; and what about me? You haven't made me any trouble, I suppose?«

»I'll make you more before I get through with you, if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head.«

Billy was silent.

»Well, what do you say to that, boy?« the constable growled.

»I'm not saying anything,« was, the reply. »I can't suit you, it seems. When I talk, you don't like it; when I hold my tongue, it is just the same, What am I to-do?«

»Answer my questions.«

»Didn't know that you had asked any. Say, you will drive me crazy if you keep on so!«

The constable was one of those cranky persons who are always talking at cross purposes and getting everybody by the ears.

He was so pompous and stuffy that nobody dared to call him down, but Billy had done it pretty effectually, for if there was anything Carker prided himself upon it was plain talk.

»I want to know where the Brown girl is?« he roared.

»Oh!« said Billy. »That's net you want to know, is it? Why the deuce didn't you say so before?«

Carker was in such a rage that he could have strangled the boy.

!Are you going to answer?« he fairly yelled.

»Oh, certainly!« replied Billy. Of course I will answer. Oh sure!«

»Do it, then.«

»I don't know!«

Billy was as grave as a deacon when he said it.«

»Haw! haw! haw!« laughed the man who was driving. »Say, Carcer, you won't never get nothing out of that boy!«

»But I will, though!« roared the constable. »You see if I don't! Billy what's-your-name, I arrest you again on charge of kidnapping. I didn't say nothing about it to you before, but that's what I wanted you for, anyhow. Now if you will put me on to where I can get the gal, perhaps I can fix things up and let you go.«

Mr. Carker began in a rage, but simmered down as he went on, and grew quite mild toward the end.

Billy had bested him, although he did not know it. The fact was, Farmer Van Dunk had offered a hundred dollars reward for the recovery of little Mamie, and that hundred dollars Constable Carker wanted to scoop in.

»I can't help you,« said Billy. »I don't know.«

The constable came down several pegs further.

»Now come, boy,« he said, »you know blamed well the child was with the show. What has become of her? Say, I'll just about promise to set you free if you will let me know.«

»Couldn't if I would, and wouldn't if I could.«

The constable broke out with a roar of rage at this, and said all sorts of things and was still saying them when suddenly the man who was driving reined in.

»What's the matter?« demanded the constable. »What in thunder are you stopping for?. Where are we at, anyhow? What place is this?«

»Now say, boss, that's just what I don't know,« replied the driver. »Blame me if I don't think I have made a mistake.«

This was exactly what he had done.

There were three ways of going between South River and Broomfield.

First by the regular road, which the show in coming over did not take.

Second, by the marsh' road, which the show had taken with such disastrous results.

Third, by an old abandoned wood road, much like the Rum Road between South River and Skadonk—in fact, it was a continuation of the same road, but a great deal worse and more thickly overgrown.

It was on to this road that the driver had inadvertently turned.

Thicker and thicker the ee had become, until now all further advance seemed to be cut off.

It was as dark as Erebus, and one of those thunder storms so frequent on the Jersey coast seemed to be coming on.

The constable knew almost as little of the roads as did the man with him, and so busy had he been with Billy that he had not observed.

»We have made a mistake! to go back!« he roared.

Then he commenced to swear and say things.

He was still at it when all at once a cry was heard in the woods ahead of them.

»Somebody lost, there, besides ourselves!« exclaimed Billy. »Hark!«

»What is it? What do they say?« demanded Carker, quieting down.

»It is a woman,« said the driver.

»Yes, and she is calling for help,« added Billy. »I -guess she is lost as well as ourselves.«

The cry came again a moment later.

»Help! Help! Help! We are lost!«

It was a woman's voice, unmistakably.

Billy's heart sank.

He recognized the voice, if the others did not. It was Muselle's.

»What in the world brought her here?« he pondered. »If she has Mamie with her, why, the game is up and both Muselle and myself will see the inside of the stone jug.«

It was certainly Miss Maiognio, and she kept right on screaming, which was just like her, for she was a most excitable person.

»Push on! Push-on!« cried the constable. »You can get the wagon between them trees if you try. We will find out what this means and then turn back and take the other road.«

The wagon slipped between the trees and then went rattling down a hill, at the bottom of which lay a swampy stretch now pretty well under water from the effects of the recent storms.

It began to rain, then, and there was considerable thunder and lightning, but at some distance away.

»Help! Help!« screamed the voice. »I'm stuck in the swamp! I don't know what to do!«

»Who in thunder can it be in here at this time of night?« cried the constable, and he called out to that effect.

»Oh, no matter who I am!« answered Muselle. I'm in trouble here and I've got a little child with me. The horse is struck in the mud! I don't know what to do!«

»That settles it,« muttered Billy; »it's Muselle and Mamie. I'm blamed if she hasn't started to run off with the child!«

This was just what it was.

The constable lighted a lantern and waded into the swamp, with the man, Bill, to help him.

Together they succeeded in freeing the mired horse, turning the buggy and getting it back onto solid ground.

But all this time Carker never had a Suspicion of the truth.

Not until when the buggy was up alongside the wagon, and Muselle, suddenly spying Billy, cried out:

»Good gracious! Is it you, Billy? And would you sit there and let me sink down into the mud? Why, you never did a thing!«

»I did the best I could for you by keeping my mouth shut, I guess,« replied Billy, grimly. »You don't know what you have struck.«

»No, no!« shouted 'Constable Carker, flashing the lantern in little Mamie's face. »But I know what I have struck, all right; it's Van Dunk's adopted child!«

CHAPTER XXIII.

BEFORE THE JUDGE.

Long after midnight an open wagon and an old buggy, with the horses well splashed with mud, and the occupants all wet and bedraggled, came into the little Jersey town of Skadonk and rounded up in front of the hotel.

It was Billy Hunt and the constable, Maggie Maloney, otherwise known as »Muselle Malognio,« and little Mamie Brown.

»I don't suppose you intend taking us to the lock-up, boss?« said Billy to the constable. »We have had a pretty hard time of it. The least you can do is to let us go to bed, here, at the hotel.«

»That's just what I won't do, you bet!« snarled Mr. Carker. »To the lock-up you both go, and don't you forget it. As for Mamie Brown, she goes home to her folks.«

But right here Constable Carker ran up against trouble himself, for little Mamie began to cry and scream, and declared that she would not go back to the cruel woman who beat her and starved her; that she would stay with »dear Muselle,« as she called Miss Malognio, and so on.

The constable was tired of all this, having been through it a dozen times on the road to Skadonk.

»Come, come; I don't want no more of this nonsense!« he growled. »Get out of there, the whole lot of you, or I'll pull you out. You two can come in and dry yourselves by the fire and get warmed up a bit, but after that, to the lock-up you go!«

Muselle was weeping and clinging to Mamie when they entered the big sitting-room of the hotel, where a log fire was burning on the open hearth.

The constable put a man at each door of the long room to guard against an escape, and then went out on some business of his own.

Fact was, Mr. Carker thought he recognized a voice among the drinkers who were talking pretty loud in the barroom as that of the very man of all others he wanted to see.

»Muselle, what on earth did you want to run away for?« demanded Billy, getting a chance to speak now for the first time.

»If you had taken the hint I gave you and quietly slid into some private house there in Broomfield, nobody would ever have found you, and it would have been all right.«

»I—I don't know what possessed me, Billy,« sobbed Muselle, holding little Mamie tight in her arms. »I was so afraid for the child—blessed angel! They shan't

take you away from me! Oh, Billy, it was a terrible mistake. I see it now. I engaged a team and started to drive over to the nearest railroad station. I was going to Philadelphia. I meant to hide myself and Mamie. I took the wrong road and got lost in the woods, and now—and now I'm going to be sent to State's prison for kidnapping, and poor Mamie will be given back to that dreadful old hag, who will starve her and beat her and burn her. Oh! Oh Oh!»

Muselle was growing hysterical.

Mamie added her cries to those of her warm-hearted protectress, and they were both at it, hammer and tongs, when the door opened and in came the constable and the little, pompous man to whom Billy had given a free ticket when the show performed at Skadonk.

»Well, well, well! What's all this about?« demanded the little man who had evidently been practising at the bar. »Don't cry, children. Don't cry.«

This only made Muselle and Mamie weep the louder. The din was dreadful and no mistake.

»Why, it is just as I tell you, Squire Pumply!« exclaimed the constable. »That boy is the boss of that very bad show which exhibited here in town the other day. He's the one who kidnapped Van Dunk's adopted daughter, and —«

»Yes, but I didn't!« broke in-Billy, boldly. »That Dunk woman was beating the little one with a strap, and She ran to us for protection. Well, we protected her, same as any other people of human feeling would have done.«

»Yes, we did! Didn't we, blessed angel?« wailed Muselle. »And we will do it again, won't we, pet?« -

She hugged Mamie the tighter, while the little girl herself, in childish tones, declared that it was all true, and begged Squire Pumply to let her stay with »dear Muselle,« and not to allow that bad man to take her back to Mrs. Van Dunk.

»Come, come!« snarled Carker. »Stop all this nonsense. I want to get through some time to-night and get to bed. Squire Pumply, I call upon you to do your duty. It is lucky that I have found you here, for that boy is as slippery as his show is bad, and the lock-up is notoriously unsafe. I demand that these tramps be committed to jail.«

»Demand! Mr. Carker!« blurted out the squire. »Demand, sir! Perhaps you don't know who you are talking to? You speak of that show being so bad, you have said it several times. Now, I didn't consider it bad, at all, and just because this young gentleman and lady happen to be in the show business, I see no reason why they should be insulted by being called tramps; as for little Mamie, I certainly shall not allow you to return her to old Mother Van Dunk without thoroughly investigating

these charges of cruelty, which I do not hear now for the first time, by any means—no, not by any means, I'd have you to understand!«

»Thank you, judge,« said Billy, bowing very politely.

»Oh, thank you, judge! Thank you!« cried Muselle. »You are a father yourself, I know. You must have children of your own.«

Now, if there was one thing beyond another which always caught Squire Pumply, it was to be called judge.

The constable had not given him this title, but the prisoners had.

Consequence was, Squire Pumply was on the side of the prisoners, first, last and all the time.

»I'll hold court right here, now!« he exclaimed. »If these people are guilty of any crime, they shall be sent to jail; but if they are not guilty, Mr. Carker«—and here the little justice glared at the constable—»if they are not guilty, I say, they shall be promptly discharged.«

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

Constable Carker hauled in his horns at once.

He saw that he had gone altogether too far. He knew that he had made a mistake.

»Well, your honor, I'm sure I don't want anything but what's right,« he whined. »I'm not the kind of man to make trouble-that's not my style. All I want is to see justice done.«

»Well, that's my business to see justice done,« declared the squire. »That's what the freeholders of this State of New Jersey elected me for,-and you may be very sure, sir, that I shall be true to my trust. Young man, you tell me the whole story about this child.«

Billy asked for nothing better.

He started in and explained all, clear, honest way.

Muselle followed, and, with many sobs, admitted that she had carried off Mamie and had kept possession of her ever since.

The little Mamie herself was asked to speak, and, in simple, childish language, told her tale of woe.

»Yes, yes!« the little justice exclaimed. »Yes, yes! I believe it all.«

»And I don't!« declared the constable, savagely. »This is all entirely irregular, Judge Pumply, as you very well know.«

»Not, at all, sir; not at all!« cried the judge, who had just stepped out for a moment and was now back attending to business again. »I'd like to ask you, constable, where the irregularity comes in?«

»It comes in from hearing only one side of the story,« persisted the constable. »It strikes me that the Van Dunks ought to have something to say about this business. These two have had a lot to say about them.«

»Very good!« returned the squire. And what do you suggest?«

»That we have the Van Dunks here, if you persist in holding court at midnight,« the constable exclaimed.

»That's just what I have done, sir,« replied the judge. »I have just sent for Mr. and Mrs. Van Dunk. They will be here in a few minutes, now.«

The constable glared.

He seemed to be headed off at every turn.

Billy kept quiet.«

Although he had hardly anything to base his opinion on, it seemed to him that matters were moving his way.

Evidently the judge had left the impromptu court-room for a double purpose. In a moment the door opened and the sheriff, with his arm in a sling, came in. Billy's spirits sank.

They rose again, however, when the door opened and the white-haired stranger, Brown, the South American circus manager, came in.

Immediately behind Brown walked Farmer Van Dunk.

Billy expected to see the old woman show up next, but she did not come.

The little judge did, however.

He immediately resumed his seat, and with all the dignity possible, called the court to order.

»Mr. Van Dunk, you are here to speak for yourself and your wife,« he said. »Do you desire to have the child, Mamie Brown, returned to your charge?«

»Waal, jedge, I don't know,« drawled the hayseed. »We did want her, a spell back, but yer see when we found we worn't likely to get her, the wife got another gal outter the poorhouse, and -«

»God help her!« broke in Muselle.

»Silence!« roared the judge. »I shall look into this, Van Dunk. Your wife is evidently not a fit person to take charge of children. I shall issue a warrant for her arrest on charge of assault and battery, committed on the person of little Mamie Brown.«

»Why judge, I swow! That's kinder rough, hain't it? That there gal was one of the most cantankerous of children and —«

»And another warrant against yourself for appropriating money sent you for the keep of this child, from her grandfather, Joseph Brown of Buenos Ayres, South America, more than five thousand dollars. Constable, let no one leave the room!«

Van Dunk turned deathly pale.

»It's false!« he cried. »Mamie Brown is an orphan; she has no relations. I never received one cent for her keep. I never even heard of this Joseph Brown!«

»That's a lie, and the biggest one you have told yet!« exclaimed the white-haired stranger, now stepping forward. »You know Joseph brown perfectly well. You have been in correspondence with him right along. He holds your receipts for more than five thousand dollars received.«

»Wh-what!« gasped Van Dunk. »Who the mischief are you?«

»Oh, I'm Joseph Brown!« replied the stranger. »Joseph Brown of Buenos Ayres, that's all. Come to my arms, little Mamie! I am your grandfather. You are my

daughter's child!«

* *
*

The tables were pretty well turned around before Squire Pumply got through with his work that night.

Let us just mention what happened to each one of the actors in this queer play, and then the story of Billy, the Box Boy must close.

Little Mamie Brown will do to begin with.

The judge decided that the child should be turned over to the custody of her grandfather, for the judge had known the white-haired stranger in days gone by, and had been talking with him all the evening, so he knew it was all straight.

Then Manager Brown of the Great South American Cireus Co. engaged Miss Muselle Malognio to go back to Buenos Ayres and sing for his show.

Happy Muselle! She declared that she and Mamie would never part.

Van Dunk went to jail.

Manager Brown made him mortgage his farm to make good the money he had stolen from little Mamie.

Judge Pumply, taking up the case of Billy's bad show next, confirmed the sheriff's claim.

He could do nothing else.

»Patricio« and partner Whiffles had abandoned the show as a bad job, and the creditors got Sandy and all the rest.

But for Billy, the trouble was only temporary.

Again Manager Brown came to the rescue.

A sheriff's sale took place two weeks later at Skadonk.

Provided with money for the purpose, by the South American manager, Billy bid in the elephant and all the horses and everything that was of any value.

One week later the steamer City of Bahia sailed for Buenos Ayres from New York.

Among the passengers were the following: Signor La Fittee, fire eater; Dannio De la Nee, ballad singer; Tom O'Grady, Irish piper; Prof. J. Johnson, elephant tamer; Jerry Rickers, clown; Muselle Malognio, vocalist; Lucette Langini, bareback rider; Mrs. Johnson, »any old thing«; Little Mamie Brown, angel child.

This was part of the list. Some canvas-men and hostlers from the bad show were there, too.

So was Manager Brown and so was Sandy, the elephant; and all hands were as happy as though they had been paid in full for the work they did for Billy's bad

show.

And Billy!

Oh, Billy was there, too!

Billy was to be first assistant to Manager Brown.

Then it was good-bye, North America, and welcome, South America, where every one did well, especially the young fellow who some_years later married Manager Brown's pretty granddaughter, and became boss of the whole big show.

His last name was Hunt and you must have to hunt for the rest of it—of course, it was **BILLY, THE BOX BOY.**

[THE END.]

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