

THE WRECK OF THE CIRCUS



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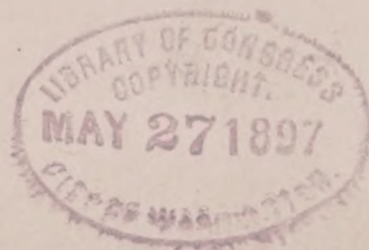


"A GUST OF WIND SWEEPED DOWN UPON THE CANVAS STRUCTURE."—p. 50.

THE
WRECK OF THE CIRCUS

BY
JAMES OTIS

AUTHOR OF "HOW TOMMY SAVED THE BARN," "A SHORT CRUISE," ETC.



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THE WRECK OF THE CIRCUS.

CHAPTER I.

THE TEMPTATION.

VERY available space in the town of Berwick whereon a placard could be displayed to advantage was occupied by the gorgeously colored posters of the "Great and Only Circus, Royal Amphitheatre, and Grand Aggregation of Living Wonders under one canvas, and to be seen for one price of admission."

Even before the "Great and Only's" advertising-car had been side-tracked at the station, nearly every boy in the village knew that the circus was coming; and when the bill-posters set about their work, they had a greater following than could have been induced to accompany the commander-in-chief of the United States Army if he had chanced to visit Berwick.

The boy who did not know, even to the minutest

detail, all that the proprietor of the "Great and Only" advertised to show his patrons would indeed have been a curiosity. Those who were prevented from going into the streets because of sickness received the deliciously thrilling information from their more fortunate friends; the deaf could and did see the wonderful pictures of impossible animals, and those who were blind heard all the particulars concerning the coming show from their comrades who had full command of both tongue and eyes.

In fact, the juvenile portion of the population talked of little else from the moment the mammoth placards appeared; and when they did change the conversation, it was to speculate as to how the necessary money with which to purchase a ticket could be procured.

As a matter of course, the majority of the young people in Berwick had good reason to believe their parents would provide ways and means for a visit to this extraordinarily enormous exhibition, even though a definite promise had not already been made; yet there were some whose minds were not so satisfactorily at rest, and among these last were Teddy Dunham and Phil Barton.

It was on the day before the "Great and Only" was advertised to make its appearance in town,

that the two met quite by chance in front of the largest collection of posters; and from the expression on the face of each, the most casual observer would have said the boy was either extremely unhappy, or suffering severe pain.

“No; I haven’t got the money,” Teddy said in reply to his friend’s question. “Mother says she can’t spare it now, times are so hard; an’ I haven’t had a single chance to earn so much as a cent. I don’t see why the circus people charge such a big price. I bought a ticket for the last show, an’ only paid a dime.”

“That’s ’cause it was a little one. This is the biggest that has ever come to Berwick.”

“Will your father let you go?”

“He says he don’t care what I do, if I’ve got the money; but he ain’t throwin’ twenty-five cents away, no matter how good a show it is. He tries to make me believe these bills don’t tell the truth; but the circus folks wouldn’t dare promise to bring such things if they didn’t mean it, would they?”

“Course not. Besides, Joe Turner’s aunt’s hired girl went to this same show over in Belleville, an’ she said there was a good deal more in the tents than is pictured out here.”

“Don’t you s’pose there’s some way we can

earn two twenty-five-cent tickets between now an' to-morrow mornin', Teddy?"

"There doesn't seem to be much chance now," Master Dunham replied gloomily; and an instant later added in a more hopeful tone, "anyway, Phil, I ain't goin' to give up tryin' till after the show has opened. Why, only two weeks ago, when I wasn't expectin' I'd get enough to buy that pair of skates from Si Jordan, old Miss Hackett hired me to lug in her wood, an' I earned thirty cents in less'n an hour."

"If you only had that now!"

"Don't I wish I had! Si could keep his old skates; for what good will they be till winter comes?"

"I wouldn't buy skates in the summer, not if I never had a pair to my name."

"You won't catch me bein' so foolish again; but they was cheap, an' I had the money. Si said he didn't believe I'd ever seen so much as twenty-five cents all in one lump, an' I wanted to show him I had. Say, Phil, will you go with me to see the show before it gets into town?"

"Course I will; I was countin' on doin' that much, anyhow."

"We'll start by daylight, an' walk as far as the cross-roads."

“Come over to my house for me?”

“Sure; but you mustn’t hang ’round primpin’ after I get there, ’cause we want to strike in ahead of the show. I sha’n’t wait, even to wash my face.”

“I’ll be ready,” said Phil; then, as if just reminded of his duty, he hastened to carry to Mrs. Harkins the message with which his mother had intrusted him a long while previous, at the same time cautioning him not to loiter by the way.

Two hours later the friends met again in front of Atwood’s store, and there was an expression of deepest gloom on Phil’s face which caused Teddy to ask solicitously, —

“What has happened? Have your folks shut down on the circus, even if you can earn money to buy a ticket?”

“They might jest as well have said I couldn’t go; for mother an’ father are reckonin’ on leavin’ early to-morrow mornin’ for a visit to Aunt Hannah, an’ won’t be back till evenin’. It seems queer that they must take circus-day for it, when there’s nothin’ to stop ’em from goin’ any other time.”

“I can’t see but you’ll be all right if we get a chance to earn money enough to pay our way in,” Teddy replied carelessly.

“Do you think it would be all right if you'd got to take care of a baby from mornin' till night? Why, I won't have so much as a chance even to see the show when it comes into town.”

Teddy gave vent to a prolonged whistle, expressive both of surprise and dismay.

Now he no longer withheld the sympathy his friend claimed, and said in a tone of commiseration, —

“Well, you are in a fix, an' no mistake! Don't you s'pose there's the least little chance you could take the baby down to the cross-roads?”

“Now, see here, Teddy, how do you think little Sam could get that far?”

“He walks all over town, an' must be as much as three years old.”

“What of that? He couldn't travel five miles, could he?”

“Well,” Teddy replied hesitatingly, “I don't know very much about babies, an' that's a fact; but it seems to me, if you went slow, an' stopped a good many times to rest, he could get there somehow. Besides, you an' I might carry him part of the time.”

“You wouldn't talk 'bout luggin' him if you'd tried it once. He's heavier than lead; I couldn't carry him from here up to the house.”

“Then, what are you goin’ to do?” and Teddy spoke impatiently, as if, in a certain degree, he blamed his friend for the unfortunate combination of circumstances which threatened to deprive him of so much pleasure.

“Do? Why, I’ll have to stay home, of course; an’ when the show comes all I’ll see of it will be when it goes by the house — perhaps it won’t even do so much as that.”

Judging from appearances one would have said the tears were very near Phil’s eyelids at this instant; and Teddy hastened to say soothingly, —

“There ain’t any use in gettin’ all down to the heel about it, ’cause perhaps it can be fixed somehow.”

“I’d like to know how you’re goin’ to fix anything. Father an’ mother’ll be sure to go away, an’ I’ve got Sam on my hands till night. A feller would have to be mighty smart to rig up a plan for me to go to the circus while that young one must tag after every step I take.”

“Why not let him go with us?” Teddy cried, as what seemed like a very happy thought presented itself to his mind. “If we can earn the money to buy ourselves tickets, perhaps we can get one for him. I ain’t so certain as they’d charge a whole quarter for a little shaver like

Sam. Jest as likely as not we could run him in for nothin'."

Phil remained for an instant in a meditative attitude, and then, his face brightening decidedly, asked eagerly, —

"Do you s'pose it could be done, Teddy? Of course Sam wouldn't be any bother to us after we once got into the show, 'cause he'd be lookin' at what was goin' on."

"It ain't certain we'll get into the circus ourselves; but if we do, I'll bet we can take him with us. It wouldn't pay to let your father an' mother know what we're countin' on."

"Why not?" Phil asked quickly, almost startled by the suggestion.

"'Cause they'd be sure to say you mustn't do it."

"But I'd be in an awful fuss when they got home."

"I don't see how you make that out. If you should say anything 'bout it now, your father would put his foot right down, 'cause he'd think you couldn't work it; but if we carried the plan through all right, an' it didn't cost him anything, of course he wouldn't care. The baby'd have a good time, your folks wouldn't be out any money, an' I'd like to know what he could make a fuss over?"

“But mother’ll be sure to tell me to stay in the house all day so’s there sha’n’t anything happen to Sam.”

“She’ll say that ’cause she’ll be afraid to have him go to the show; but when they come home an’ find he’s been there an’ got back as sound as ever, she’ll be glad he’s had a good time.”

Phil did not feel positive that this was a sound argument; but he was eager to believe all Master Dunham had said, therefore but few additional words were necessary to convince him that he would really be doing the baby a great favor if he acted upon Teddy’s suggestion.

After an exceedingly brief struggle with his conscience the matter was ended, so far as he was concerned, and once more came the question as to how the necessary amount of money might be procured.

This was a problem which Teddy could not solve as readily as he had the one regarding Sam; but he replied confidently, as if firmly believing his own assertion, —

“We’ll get it somehow, an’ don’t you make any mistake. I’m goin’ to settle right down to it for the rest of this day; an’ if I strike a job that two of us can work at, you must turn to an’ do your share.”

“Of course I will. You don’t think I’d be such a chump as to lay still while you was earnin’ money for me as well as yourself! Come over to the house if you find anything, ’cause I’ve got to stay there pretty close while mother’s gettin’ ready to go away.”

Again the two friends separated, this time feeling more confident that they would be able to visit the circus, because some of the difficulties in their way had apparently been swept aside so readily.

While he had been talking with Teddy, Phil gave little or no heed to the fact that it would probably become necessary to disobey his parents’ positive commands in case this plan of taking the baby to the circus was carried into effect.

Now that he was alone, however, he began to realize to what he had committed himself, and the prospect was far from pleasing.

“Mother will be certain to make me promise to stay ’round the house all day, an’ of course I shall have to agree,” he said to himself. “Then father’s bound to talk ’bout the circus, an’ how I am to keep Sam away from it, an’ I’ll have to make another promise; so by the time they leave I’ll be tied up in such a way that it will be a terrible snarl when I start out for the show.”

Then, for an instant, he mentally resolved he would resist the temptation, obey strictly such injunctions as his parents might place upon him, and deprive himself of the long-anticipated pleasure, with the hope of gaining such satisfaction as comes from the knowledge of having done right.

While he was feeling strong enough to resist the temptation of following Teddy's suggestion, he arrived at that portion of the street where the posters of the "Great and Only" were most conspicuous; and here he very foolishly allowed himself to gaze upon the glaring pictures once more.

With the wonderful feats before him which the advertisements promised, Phil's determination strictly to obey his parents grew more and more feeble, until, by the time he was ready to turn his back on the alluring placards, he had very nearly resolved to do as Teddy proposed.

"I just wish it would rain to-morrow," he muttered discontentedly, "for then it wouldn't be half so bad to stay in the house takin' care of that bothersome baby; but it will be my luck to have the sun shinin' bright, an' everything goin' at full blaze, so I can't mind father an' mother, no matter how hard I try."

Not less than a dozen times from the moment of his second parting with Teddy Dunham, until

his eyes were closed in the unconsciousness of slumber, did Phil resolve to do that which he knew to be his duty, and as many times did he waver in his resolutions.

Just before he went to bed, his mother said in such a tone as she believed was best calculated to impress her commands upon his memory, —

“I want you to realize, Philip, how much responsibility we are putting upon you. There are few boys of your age who could be trusted to take care of a child like Sammie; but I have every confidence in you.” Here Phil mentally winced. “You won’t have any trouble with the baby during the forenoon; for there will be so much going on in the street, owing to the coming of the circus, that he’ll be perfectly content to sit on the doorstep by your side. I fear you may have some little difficulty in the afternoon, when he has grown tired. Be patient with him, Philip; remember that Sammie is only a baby, and harsh words would frighten rather than soothe him. It is possible he may sleep an hour or two, in which case your task will be so much the lighter. I am sorry you are to be deprived of the pleasure of going to the circus, but at some time in the future I will try to compensate for what you may lose in the way of enjoyment to-morrow. I know you’ll

be a good boy, Philip, and that there is really no reason why I should feel any anxiety concerning the baby."

"I don't see why she had to talk that way," Phil said to himself when he was alone in his room. "I'd had it hard enough to do as Teddy planned without that; an' now it seems as if I couldn't make up my mind to take Sam to the show, no matter how much money we may have a chance to earn."

Then once more came into his mind the thought of what might be seen inside the huge tent which was to be erected on the morrow, and again it seemed almost impossible for him to follow the dictates of conscience.

The morning on which the "Great and Only" was to exhibit in Berwick dawned as bright and fair as Phil Barton could have desired had his parents decided he might visit the circus.

"I reckon by this time Teddy an' the rest of the fellers are watchin' the show-people get ready to come into town," Master Barton said to himself with a long-drawn sigh as, in obedience to his father's summons, he scrambled out of bed. "I *did* hope it would rain to-day; but nothin' happens to help *me* through."

While hurriedly making his toilet Phil gave

more thought to the question of how he could evade his parents' commands than to the principle that he should obey them ; and when he came down-stairs there was in his mind a reasonably well-defined idea that it was absolutely necessary for him to do as Teddy Dunham had suggested.

It was a great relief to him as the moments went by that his mother, fully occupied with her preparations for the journey, did not repeat the conversation of the previous evening ; but when the carriage was at the door, and she ready for departure, Phil was forced to listen to what, under other circumstances, would have been decidedly pleasing.

“ I know you can be trusted, Philip, therefore I need not explain in detail what you are expected to do. Remember that Sammie is only a baby, and be patient with him. If we are not home by sunset, put him to bed, and lie down by his side until he falls asleep.”

Then the carriage was whirled away ; and Phil was left with Sam and his conscience, which last companion was at this moment particularly troublesome.

“ At any rate, I didn't promise I wouldn't go,” he said to himself, wondering not a little why this fact did not give him greater satisfaction.

“Mother can’t say I told a wrong story, if — but what’s the use of fussin’ ’bout it now? Jest as likely as not Teddy won’t find a chance to earn money, an’ then we couldn’t go, even if Sam wasn’t ’round to bother.”

The baby did not appear to be particularly well pleased at being left alone with his brother, and during the next half-hour Phil had quite as much as he could attend to in the way of entertaining Sam.

He finally succeeded in his efforts by telling him of the wonderful sights they were to see that forenoon; and, as can well be imagined, the conversation served not only to pacify the baby, but still further to weaken the feeble resolution yet remaining in Phil’s mind regarding the performance of his duty.

It was not yet seven o’clock when an unusual commotion on the street told that the “Aggregation of Living Wonders” was approaching the town.

Now a herd of ponies was driven rapidly toward the vacant lot on which the “Great and Only” was to exhibit; and then the same diminutive steeds would dash wildly down the street again, going, as Phil knew, to help swell the ranks of the coming parade.

It seemed as if every boy of Master Barton's acquaintance who had not journeyed to the cross-roads to witness the preparations for the *entrée*, made it his especial business to stop at the house for a chat with Phil regarding the all-engrossing event; and after each visitor had departed the amateur nurse was more than ever resolved to act contrary to his parents' implied commands.

An hour after the last herd of ponies had scampered into town and out again, as if simply to announce the approach of this most wonderful of all exhibitions, Teddy Dunham arrived nearly breathless with excitement and rapid running.

"She's come, Phil!" he shouted, not slackening his pace until he was on the step of the door by the side of Master Barton and Sam. "There was a whole crowd of fellers down to the cross-roads as soon as ever it began to grow light this mornin', an' I stayed till after the procession was pretty near in shape to start. Why, them pictures don't begin to tell half that belongs to this circus. I never saw such a drove of horses an' beasts in my life, an' of course we couldn't see into very many of the cages. And the wagons! Well, they're the finest that ever was! More gold on 'em than would buy two such towns as this! And

say, Phil, they've got three bands — three carts full of musicianers!"

"Have they started yet?"

"I reckon so by this time. It looked as if everything was ready when I come away, an' I was mighty sorry to leave 'em; but it didn't seem fair when you wasn't 'round, so I come up to wait here till they'd been through the town. Then I'm goin' to hunt for a job."

"You don't stand much chance of gettin' one to-day. Folks ain't likely to think of work when they can see the circus."

"I don't know 'bout that. Now, there's Mr. Atwood; what does he care for the show?"

"Are you countin' on his hirin' you?"

"He might."

"Yes; an' if he should, you wouldn't get more'n ten cents."

"But you see he'd have to pay a good deal bigger price for a job on a day like this, an' that's what I'm figgerin' on. Boys will be scarce from now till to-morrow mornin', 'cause them fellers what have got enough to pay their way into the show couldn't be hired to work. But what's troublin' me is, that while you have to take care of the baby you won't have much chance to help me, even if I should find a good job."

“That’s all ’cordin’ to what sort of work is to be done. If it was out-doors, Sam could kinder take care of himself, if we had an eye on him once in a while. I’m ’fraid you won’t be hired, an’ it would be awful if we shouldn’t see this circus, Teddy.”

“Awwful? Why, Phil, that’s no name for it! I don’t care so very much ’bout the general run of shows; but it ain’t once in a lifetime a circus like this comes to Berwick — I don’t believe one of the kind ever was here before, an’ we’ve got to get in some way!”

“See here, Teddy,” and Phil tried earnestly to prevent a big lump from rising in his throat; “I don’t believe you’ll find any chance to earn money enough for both of us, an’ if it can’t be done, you mustn’t bother ’bout me.”

“If I see a sight for one, I can make it do for two, I reckon. I tell you the thing has *got* to be done, so don’t worry, for — There she comes! There she comes! Now you’re going to see some-thing that’s never been ’round this part of the country before!”

Strains of music in the distance told of the approach of the “Great and Only;” and from that moment until the end of the cavalcade had passed the Barton homestead, neither the boys nor the

baby heeded anything save the gorgeous procession which caused the dusty road to appear a perfect blaze of color.

Then, and not until then, did Teddy assume an air of business, as, leaping down from his point of vantage on the veranda, he said hurriedly, —

“Now I’ve got to leave. There’s no time to lose. Perhaps I’ll be gone quite a spell; an’ if you are tired of waitin’, go over by the circus grounds where I’ll be certain to find you.”

He departed hurriedly, and Phil no longer thought of duty; the sole question in his mind was as to how he and the baby might be able to enter the huge tents which he knew were already being erected.

CHAPTER II.

THE OPPORTUNITY.



WHEN the streets were comparatively deserted, after the passage of the gorgeous cavalcade, and Teddy had gone in search of employment whereby he might earn sufficient money to purchase tickets to the exhibition, the moments passed slowly and wearily to Phil.

Little Sam, no longer entertained by the unusual spectacle which had so completely enchained his attention, grew fretful, and the amateur nurse found it difficult to prevent him from loudly lamenting the absence of his mother.

“I don’t dare to walk ’round with you now, Sam, ’cause you’ll get all tired out, an’ want to go to sleep just when it’s time for the circus to begin. Even if Teddy an’ I can’t get in to see the performance, we’ll want to stay ’round the tents a spell, an’ of course I’ve got to take you. Why not go to sleep now, an’ then you’ll be in good trim for travellin’ over the show grounds.”

It is hardly probable little Sam understood his

brother's advice ; he certainly did not act upon the suggestion, but grew more and more uneasy, until Phil finally said in a tone which had in it an inflection of satisfaction, —

“ If mother was here this minute she'd see it wasn't any use to try an' keep you quiet at home, so there's nothin' else for me to do but take you down to the show. Even if we hadn't counted on goin' in case Teddy gets the money, I'd have to do this much.”

Then, locking the doors carefully, he took Sam by the hand, walking slowly through the garden until, having arrived at the gate, he stopped for an instant while he said, much as if he were talking to the shrubs and flowers, —

“ You see, it ain't any kind of use to try to do what mother told me, without I'm willin' Sam shall yell till he's red in the face ; an' that's what he's bound to do unless I can keep him quiet by showin' him 'round the circus-grounds.”

Having thus vindicated himself, as it were, Master Barton walked as swiftly as Sam's tiny legs could be forced to carry their owner.

There was no one in the village to detain Phil or the baby. It was as if the white tents a quarter of a mile distant were lodestones of such power that every boy within a radius of three

miles was drawn toward them despite his will; and in Phil's case the power of attraction was much stronger because of the doubt in his mind as to whether it would be possible for him to witness the performance.

During the first portion of the short journey the baby protested vehemently against being forced to walk so rapidly; but when once the walls of cloth ornamented by flags of every color and shape could be seen, he willingly trudged on by the side of his brother, laughing and gurgling with delight at the wondrous spectacle before him.

Phil, with no idea that there was anything to be done save amuse the baby, walked from one tent to another admiring the huge banners on which were painted pictures of what was alleged could be seen inside, or talked with his friends and acquaintances regarding the afternoon's performance, until his mind became so thoroughly filled with the deliciously strange objects on every hand that there was no room for thought of his mother's parting instructions.

When he had been on this seemingly enchanted ground half an hour or more, he went, quite by accident, in the direction of the tents used as stables, and there proceeded to feast his eyes on the horses.

It was while he stood with the baby by his side, admiring a pair of spotted ponies which were being carefully groomed, that he heard a familiar voice from among the animals cry, —

“Hi! Phil! Hold on a minute! I want to talk with you!”

Master Barton searched in vain with his eyes for the speaker. He knew it was Teddy who had hailed him, but yet the cry seemed to have come from one of the circus employees.

While he was gazing around in perplexity, Master Dunham, with a smile on his face expressive of the most intense satisfaction, and carrying in his hands two water-pails, came toward him.

“Well, I’ve struck jest the kind of a job I was huntin’ after!”

“Did you come out of that tent?” Phil asked excitedly.

“Didn’t you see me? I’m jest the same as one of the circus men now. I’m luggin’ water for the horses. It ain’t five minutes since I had my arms ’round the neck of that spotted pony nearest us. That’s what you can call a stunner!”

“Will they really let you go in an’ out of there as often as you like?”

“Of course. Didn’t I say I was luggin’ water

for the horses? I've been workin' here 'most an hour."

"Are you goin' to get anything for it?"

"Sure; though I'd been willin' to do it for nothin' rather'n not have a chance. One of the men said he'd pay me if I'd bring all the water he wanted, an' I told him I wouldn't ask for a cent if he'd give me two tickets for the show."

"And is he truly goin' to give them to you?" Phil asked, now finding it difficult to retain his hold of Sam's hand because of the sense of excitement which was rapidly taking possession of him.

"He said he would if I'd do work enough, an' you better believe I'm hustlin' lively. Say, why can't you help me? If there was two of us we'd surely earn the tickets."

Phil actually forgot the baby for an instant, and had already seized one of the pails, when he suddenly remembered his charge.

"How can I?" he cried in a tone of disappointment. "The baby couldn't run back an' forth, even if I dared to take him into the tent with us."

"Why not make him set out here till we get through?"

"I'd like to see you make him do anything he didn't fancy."

“Put him right down on the ground, an’ chuck a couple of rocks on his dress; that’ll hold him.”

“Yes, an’ he’d yell loud enough to break up the whole show. It ain’t any use — there’s Sadie Parker! I wonder if she wouldn’t take care of him for a spell?”

“Try it. Say you’ll give her them agates of yours if she’ll look out for him till this job is finished. They ain’t worth so much money as you’ve always counted on, an’ I’m sure I’d rather give her twice as much than miss goin’ to the show.”

Hurriedly Phil made his way with the baby to where Sadie was standing, deeply occupied with all that was going on around her; and in a few moments she was engaged as temporary nurse for little Sam.

The temptation to become the owner of the best collection of agates in Berwick was sufficient inducement, and she promised to care for the child as carefully as even his mother would.

This last assertion set at rest any doubts in Phil’s mind, if indeed there had been any, regarding the abandonment of the baby during the remainder of the forenoon; and he set eagerly about availing himself of the opportunity of earning a ticket of admission to the circus.

When half an hour had passed his arms ached from the constant strain of carrying water, tiny streams of perspiration ran down his flushed face, and he was as weary as a boy well can be; but there was no thought of relinquishing his proud position as water-carrier to the circus horses, at least not until he had fully earned that for which he was laboring.

More than once during this time had he seen the baby, who appeared to be perfectly contented with the change of nurses; and there was no reason, so he argued with himself, why he should feel otherwise than exceedingly well pleased with the prospects before him.

Noon came, and Teddy's employer still demanded more water.

"I ought to go an' get Sam," Phil whispered. "Sadie only agreed to take care of him till dinner-time."

"It won't do to knock off now, 'cause we've got the tickets almost earned, an' the man might be mad if we didn't fill our contract," Teddy replied in a matter-of-fact tone, which convinced Phil it was wisest to follow his friend's advice.

The boys worked industriously half an hour longer, until every barrel and pail in the tent had been filled.

But now it was not possible to find the man who had hired them ; and Phil said, after they had walked twice around the stable-tents, —

“It’s no use, I’ll have to go an’ get the baby now, an’ you can keep on huntin’ for the man. It won’t be such a dreadful long while before the doors are open, so I’ll take Sam an’ hang ’round in front of the big tent till you come.”

Phil hurried away as he ceased speaking, going directly toward that portion of the enclosure where he had last seen Sadie and the baby, but failing to find either.

Growing slightly disturbed in mind, he ran from one end of the tenting-grounds to the other, inquiring eagerly for the missing nurse of every acquaintance he met ; but getting no information until he was nearly breathless from his exertions, when Leander Phinney told him he had seen Sadie Parker on her way home some time previous, and that she was then alone.

“Are you certain Sam wasn’t with her ?” Phil asked in a tone of alarm.

“Don’t you s’pose I could see the baby if he’d been there ? She was goin’ home full speed ; I reckon she’d stayed down here too long, an’ was afraid her mother might scold.”

It seemed strange that just at this moment,

when his anxiety was very great, there should come into his mind the memory of what his mother had said when she left him. That Sam could not be found was surely trouble enough, without his being forced to endure the prickings of conscience.

While one might have counted twenty he stood gazing around him in perplexity; and then came the thought that the first course to be pursued was to question Sadie regarding Sam's whereabouts, and with the utmost haste he set about carrying this idea into execution.

He was yet some distance from the Parker home, when Sadie, having seen him from the window, came quickly out into the street with an expression of alarm on her face, asking before he had time to make any explanations, —

“Didn't you find the baby where I left him?”

“I didn't see him anywhere.”

“I stayed with him just as long as I dared, for mother told me if I wasn't home by dinner-time I couldn't go to the circus this afternoon. I hadn't seen you for more than an hour, an' began to think I'd have to give up going to the show, when a woman asked what the trouble was. After I'd told her, she said she'd take care of the baby till you come.”

“Who was the woman?”

“I don’t know, but think she belonged to the circus. She acted as if it was her business to be there.”

“Did she promise to stay right in that spot?”

“I don’t know as those were her very words; but she said she’d take care of him till you come.”

Phil, now growing bewildered, stood for an instant staring blankly at Sadie, and she, believing he was mutely reproaching her for having thus abandoned the baby, as it were, burst into tears.

“I couldn’t stay any longer, Phil, indeed I couldn’t, because mother told me I must be home at dinner-time, and besides, you promised to be back in an hour. I took the very best care of him till long past twelve o’clock, an’ then I *had* to come away.”

Her tears almost terrified Phil, because he understood by them that she believed little Sam was really lost; and, turning quickly, he ran toward the tenting-ground at full speed, stopping only when he saw an acquaintance, and then for no longer time than was required to ask concerning the baby.

No one had seen little Sam save while he was with Sadie; and even though he yet remained

within the enclosure, Phil understood it would be an extremely difficult task to find him, because of the dense crowd, growing larger each instant, which surged to and fro before the many attractions.

He was darting here and there irresolutely, hoping even against hope that he might by accident stumble upon the baby, when Teddy confronted him.

“You’re a nice fellow for a partner, ain’t you? If you’d been down by the big tent ten minutes ago we could have walked straight in. The man was there, an’ said we didn’t need tickets, ’cause he’d put us past the doorkeeper.”

“But Sam is lost, Teddy. I can’t find him anywhere.”

“Sadie Parker’s got him, of course.”

“She hasn’t! I’ve just been up to her house;” and Phil repeated what had been told him.

“It’s all right if one of the show women took him. I s’pose he’s inside the big tent this minute, walkin’ ’round large as life, enjoyin’ himself. That’s your place to strike him. Come on; let’s find the man again that hired me to lug water, an’ then we’ll have hold of Sam in less than no time.”

Master Dunham spoke so decidedly, as if there

was no reason to be alarmed concerning little Sam, that Phil's fears were allayed, and he began to believe he had really been foolish in thus allowing himself to be disturbed because of what was surely only a temporary disappearance of the baby.

"I never thought of his bein' inside the tent," he said in a half apologetic tone.

"Of course he's bound to be there, if one of the show women took care of him. If you'd come right to me jest as soon as Sadie Parker told you, we'd had him by this time."

Master Dunham did not attempt to explain how, amid that throng, he could have been found more readily than the baby; and Phil was so relieved in mind because of believing he now knew Sam's whereabouts, that he was not disposed to find fault with the rather petulant words.

"Let's go right away an' find the man who hired you."

"That ain't so easy as you might think for," Master Dunham grumbled. "I went all over these grounds more'n a dozen times before I saw him in the first place, an' now jest as likely as not we'll have to do the same thing."

"I'm sorry," Phil said humbly; "but I was frightened, an' couldn't help goin' up to Sadie's house, for I thought the baby was really lost."

Teddy made no reply to this apology, and the two began to search for their employer.

After ten minutes had been spent fruitlessly walking to and fro, Master Dunham came to the conclusion that the task would not be concluded until the performance had begun, and again he reproached his friend and partner with having deprived him of the fruits of his labor.

Phil defended himself to the best of his ability, and in a most humble manner, for he believed himself quite as culpable as Teddy would have it appear.

Fifteen minutes passed, and yet the man who had promised to admit them to the tents was not found.

"It's an awful pity you tried to help me get into the circus," Phil said sorrowfully, "'cause you'd be there now except for my hangin' on."

"It can't be helped," Teddy replied in a tone which told his companion he was thoroughly angry because of the delay.

"I wouldn't tag 'round any longer if it wasn't that I've got to fetch the baby out of there."

"I sha'n't find him any sooner if you leave now, so you may as well stick," Teddy said grimly; and it is possible he might have allowed his anger to burst forth into yet plainer words, if just at

that moment the man for whom he was seeking had not appeared.

“That’s him !” Master Dunham cried, and Phil gave vent to a deep sigh of relief. He was rejoiced that the search had come to an end, for now it seemed certain he would soon have little Sam in his charge once more.

The desire to see the circus was by no means so great as during the earlier portion of the day, before so much trouble had come upon him.

Teddy made his demand for payment, and the showman was ready to comply with it.

Conducting the two to the entrance of the largest tent, he spoke a few words to the ticket-taker, and that functionary allowed them to pass him.

At last Phil was inside the magic portals, but this fact did not give him the pleasure he had expected.

On every hand were the fancifully painted cages containing animals concerning which he had read but never seen, yet he paid little or no attention to them. The herd of elephants which, under different circumstances, would have held him spell-bound for at least an hour, were now unheeded, and Teddy cried sharply as Phil would have walked swiftly through this tent which appeared

to be literally crowded with curious forms of life, —

“Where are you goin’? We want to hold on here till we’ve seen everything. Jest look at that cage of monkeys, will you!”

“I can’t stop now, Teddy. I’ve got to find Sam first.”

“What’s the use fussin’ ’bout him so long as he’s all right?”

“But I don’t know that he is.”

“Of course you do! Didn’t Sadie Parker say a woman promised to take care of him?”

“Yes, that’s what she said; but I ought to have him by this time, ’cause the show’ll open pretty soon.”

“Let’s jest walk past these cages slow once, an’ then I’ll go with you. We can see a good deal more’n we can when Sam is here taggin’ along.”

Phil’s one desire was to find the baby; but his companion had done him such a great favor, even at the risk of being himself deprived of seeing all the wonders contained in the “Great and Only,” that it seemed like the grossest ingratitude to disregard any reasonable proposal he might make.

Therefore, much against his inclination, he accompanied Teddy around the menagerie tent.

Phil realized that he should have been filled

with surprise and admiration at what he saw ; but even the den of Bengal tigers failed to interest him, and in the antics of the monkeys he could see nothing amusing, because all the while his conscience was troubling him with the suggestion that he had shamefully neglected little Sam, who might at that very moment be in need of his brotherly care.

It seemed to him as if fully half the afternoon had passed before Teddy finally announced his willingness to enter the main tent where both believed the baby would be found ; and once there he glanced eagerly around at the almost vacant benches, for it was so early that the spectators were as yet occupied with viewing the animals.

Not more than fifty people were on the rude seats calculated to accommodate many hundred, and but one glance sufficed to show him that Sam was not among them.

CHAPTER III.

THE SEARCH.



It was several moments before Phil could convince himself that the baby was not in this tent.

Teddy appeared to feel so confident there was no cause for alarm concerning little Sam, — that in order to find him it was only necessary to visit this portion of the circus, — that Phil had been comparatively easy in mind regarding him; but now Master Dunham's mistake was proven, the neglectful nurse was overwhelmed with grief and remorse.

“He isn't here, Teddy! He isn't here! He's lost! He's lost, an' I'm to blame for it all!”

“Don't act like as if you was crazy,” Master Dunham said sharply and more impatiently than usual, because he was really alarmed, but trying to prevent his friend from suspecting it. “There ain't any reason to say he's lost if you don't happen to see him jest this minute. Perhaps the woman is where the animals are, huntin' for us.”

“Then let’s go straight back an’ find her. S’posin’ mother should come home, an’ Sam wasn’t there?”

“There’s no need of s’posin’ anything like that, ’cause she won’t be here till dark, an’ we’ll find him before the show begins,” Teddy said as he followed his friend, who was walking swiftly—almost running—in the direction from which he had just come.

To make a thorough search of that section of the exhibition containing the caged animals was well-nigh impossible, owing to the press of sight-seers. The spacious tent was filled almost to overflowing with the citizens of Berwick and adjoining villages, and a difficult task it was for the two boys to force their way through the throng.

To ascertain definitely whether Sam was here or not could not be done, and despite his grief and anxiety, Phil soon realized this fact.

“We couldn’t find him in a month, even if he was huntin’ for us,” the boy wailed. “What shall I do, Teddy?”

“I don’t see as there’s much of anything that can be done till this crowd clears out,” Master Dunham replied; and his voice was just a trifle unsteady, for now he was becoming thoroughly

alarmed. "When the folks have gone into the other tent we'll be sure to find him."

"But we ain't certain he's really here."

"Of course he must be in one place or the other, Phil, an' you're only makin' a bad matter worse by gettin' so fussed up over it. S'pose you walk back an' forth on this side, an' I'll go straight across; we'll stand twice as much show of strikin' him as if we hunted together."

Phil made no objection to this plan. He was so terrified as to be almost helpless; and when his friend left him he paced to and fro in a circumscribed space, struggling to prevent the tears from showing themselves.

It was an aimless, incompetent search he made just at this time. The only idea in his mind seemed to be that he must continue to move about; and he did so at random, until confronted by Sadie Parker, who exclaimed as she seized him by the arm, —

"O Phil! *Have* you found the baby yet?"

"No; an' he must be lost for certain."

It was no longer possible for Phil to restrain his tears, and as the big drops chased each other down his cheeks he told in an incoherent fashion what he and Teddy had already done.

"Of course the woman wouldn't want to keep

him forever," the girl said with an effort to soothe her distressed friend, although at the same time sharing his terror. "I am certain she belonged to the circus, because I'd never seen her before, an' she acted as if she had a right to be on the grounds. Are you *sure* he isn't in the other tent?"

"He wasn't there a little while ago."

"Go straight back and look again. Ask everybody if they've seen him, an' I'll hunt here till you get back."

Without stopping to realize that he might not be able to find her again amid the throng, Phil obeyed in silence.

On returning to the adjoining structure the neglectful nurse saw that a much larger number of people had assembled, and it was no longer possible for him to ascertain by a single glance if the baby was there.

As he walked hurriedly in front of the step-like seats, he saw many acquaintances, and of each he asked the same question, —

"Have you seen our Sam?"

"No," was the invariable reply, coupled with the request for information, "Is he lost?"

"Sadie Parker says some woman belongin' to the show had him at dinner-time."

Then as Phil passed on he frequently heard one say to another, —

“ Mrs. Barton’s baby is lost. I suppose she left him in that boy’s care, and he thought more of seeing the circus than he did of attending to the child.”

This remark was repeated in a variety of forms, and each time he heard it Phil’s grief increased until it seemed almost impossible to longer control himself.

If at that moment he could have thrown himself down at his mother’s knee, knowing little Sam was safe at home, how penitently he would have begged her forgiveness, and how gladly received such punishment for his neglect of duty as she might have seen fit to inflict.

Unfortunately, however, this could not be ; and he continued on his fruitless search until he had made a circuit of the tent without having met a single person who had seen little Sam since the moment Sadie Parker confided him to the care of the stranger.

He had involuntarily halted at the entrance of the menagerie tent, when Teddy Dunham came toward him hurriedly, and a great hope sprang up in Phil’s mind as he cried eagerly, —

“ Have you found him ? ”

“I don’t believe he’s out where the animals are. Have you made sure he isn’t here?”

“I’ve asked almost everybody.”

“Been all the way ’round?”

“Yes; an’ looked in every place. It’s no use, Teddy! It’s no use! He’s lost!”

“I tell you he ain’t. The woman has got him, an’ she’s somewhere, of course.”

“Then why haven’t we seen her? We’ve been in both tents.”

“She may be outside looking for you this very minute.”

Strange as it may seem, this idea had not occurred to Phil. Having been assured by his friend that the woman must be in that particular tent, he had given himself wholly up to the idea; but once another had been suggested, he was eager to put it to the test.

“What are you going to do?” Teddy shouted hoarsely; and Phil, not slackening his speed, replied, —

“Goin’ to find that woman, if she’s outside.”

“Be sure to tell the doorkeeper that you want to come back again, else you won’t get the chance.”

Phil no longer had any desire to see the alleged wonders of the “Great and Only,” and but for this warning of his friend he would have made his

way past the ticket-taker without arranging for a possible return; but Teddy's words were ringing in his ear, and he said to the doorkeeper, —

“I've got to go out and hunt for the baby. Will you let me in if I want to come back?”

“Go ahead. I'll remember your face,” the man replied carelessly; and even amid his grief Phil wondered why it was this *attaché* of the circus could be so indifferent after he had been told that little Sam was lost.

Although the doors of the big tent were open to admit those who wished to enter, the crowd on the outside was even larger than at noon; and as the frightened boy ran to and fro, he realized that his search would be quite as difficult as it had been under the canvas.

Like one frantic he darted from point to point, stopping to inquire for little Sam whenever he met an acquaintance, and always receiving the same answer.

It was as if the baby had disappeared from off the face of the earth at the very instant Sadie Parker gave him over to the care of the stranger.

Phil met Mrs. Merrill, a kindly, motherly old lady, who lived in the house adjoining his father's, and of her he asked tearfully, —

“Have you seen our Sam?”

“ Bless my soul, Philip! What is the matter? Seen him? Of course I have.”

“ When? Where?” Phil asked eagerly.

“ This morning, when you and he were watching the circus parade.”

“ I mean have you seen him since?”

“ Why no, child. He isn't lost, I hope?”

“ That's jest what he is,” Phil wailed. “ Sadie Parker was takin' care of him this noon, but had to go home at dinner-time, and some woman promised to look out for him till I come.”

“ Who was the woman?”

“ I don't know. Sadie thought she belonged to the show.”

“ And she trusted that poor, innocent baby with one of these circus people? Why, Philip Barton, what will your mother say to you? I always looked upon you as being a careful, honest boy. What *will* your mother say?”

“ She can't say anything to make me feel worse than I do now,” Phil cried as he gave way to a flood of tears. “ I couldn't help it. I jest left him with Sadie a little while, and when I came back he had gone.”

“ But why did you leave him with her? Why wasn't you caring for him as you should?”

“ Teddy Dunham an' I was luggin' water for

the horses so's we'd get a ticket to go into the show, and of course I couldn't take Sam with me. Sadie said she'd keep him if I gave her my agates, an' I s'posed he'd be all right. I wouldn't have deserted him for a million dollars, you know that, Mis' Merrill."

"And you thought lugging water for the circus horses was more important than taking care of your own flesh-and-blood brother?" the old lady asked severely; and this reproof, from a quarter where he had fully expected sympathy, plunged Phil into the very depths of despair.

Mrs. Merrill had spoken as if there could be no question but that the baby was irreclaimably lost, after having been given into the care of the "circus woman;" and the faint hope which had still lingered in Phil's mind departed.

He ran to the rear of one of the smaller tents, with no other thought than that of hiding himself, and there, lying at full length upon the ground, gave himself wholly up to grief and remorse.

He had no idea of the flight of time. It might have been five minutes or half an hour, when he was aroused by the cry, —

"Hi! Phil! Phil Barton!"

Starting to his feet, he ran out from behind the screen of canvas, as he shouted, —

“Hello! Who is it?”

“Me — Teddy.”

“Have you found the baby?”

“I know where he is, an’ it’s all right. Come quick, or you’ll miss the show.”

Phil ran swiftly in the direction from which the voice had come, and was greeted by his friend, who said impatiently, —

“It seems as if everybody was tryin’ to make me lose this circus after all the work I’ve had to get in. Jest as likely as not the show has begun while I’m out here huntin’ for you. What you been doin’?”

“Where’s Sam?” Phil cried, giving no heed to the question.

“With the woman who took him from Sadie Parker.

“How do you know?”

“When I couldn’t find him in either of the tents, I went out and begun askin’ some of the show people if they’d seen him, an’ that’s what you ought to have done in the first place.”

“And had they?” Phil interrupted nervously.

“Of course they had. One of the canvas men said he saw something or other Marie, I don’t know what he meant, goin’ into the dressing-room with a strange youngster.”

“ Did you follow her ? ”

“ I tried ; but they wouldn't let me in. ”

“ Why didn't you say you was after Sam ? ”

“ I did ; but the man there said it wouldn't be any use to go in till after the show was over ; that the baby was safe enough, ' cause he couldn't get away, and the women-folks would tend to him. ”

“ But I want him now, ” Phil cried sharply ; and at this, to him, foolish persistence Master Dunham lost the slight stock of patience remaining.

“ Then go an' bring him out, ” he said petulantly. “ Perhaps you can sneak in after I tried an' couldn't. The show's begun by this time, an' you can miss it if you're mind to ; but you'll only be makin' a fool of yourself, ' cause it's jest as well to get him when the performance has ended. ”

“ Where is the dressing-room ? ”

“ Round behind the big tent ; ” and Teddy, believing the search had been ended so successfully that there was no longer any reason for anxiety, hastened away to take his place among the spectators, determined to lose no further opportunity of seeing the marvels of the “ Great and Only. ”

Phil ran at full speed in the direction pointed out by his friend, and had no difficulty in finding the dressing-room to which he referred.

To effect an entrance, however, was not so simple. When he would have pushed his way through the canvas flap, a burly, ill-kempt fellow barred the passage, threatening him with most direful punishment unless he speedily "made his way out of there."

"Teddy Dunham says our baby's here, an' I've got to come in," Phil persisted, bold in the belief that he was demanding only what was his right.

"Are you after the kid Mlle. Marie brought in?" the man asked in a more kindly tone.

"I'm after Sam, an' Sadie Parker said one of the circus folks took him."

"There's a youngster in the women's dressing-room; but neither you nor I can go in there until the show is over."

"But I must. I've got to get Sam right away."

"Oh, you must, eh? Well, you'll have to set about some other way of doin' it. The rule of this 'ere show is that nobody is allowed in the women's dressing-rooms while the performance is goin' on, an' I'm here to see that it ain't broken."

"But it's our baby I'm after," Phil cried, astonished that he should be denied admittance under the circumstances.

"I can't help that. It's my business to keep

everybody out, so be off with you. You can come back as soon as the performance is over, and then nobody will try to stop you."

"But look here, mister, I've *got* to find Sam. Won't you please let me in jest for a minute?"

The man raised his hand as if about to strike the importunate boy, and then, probably ashamed of himself, lowered it quickly as he said in a milder tone, —

"Now see here, my lad, I've told you jest how it is. No one is allowed in that 'ere dressing-room while the performance is goin' on; an' if I should let anybody pass, no matter who he was, I'd lose my job before sundown. You'll have to find the old man if you count on gettin' in there right away."

"Who's the old man?"

"Who is he? Why, he's the owner of the 'Great and Only.'"

"Where is he?"

"That's something I can't tell you, my son. He's likely to be on the grounds, or in the big tent, or almost anywhere. But you may count that he's keepin' his eye mighty sharp on them as works for him, wherever he is."

"I wouldn't know him if I saw him," Phil said tearfully.

“ You’re right, my son, an’ now take a bit of advice from me. I reckon I know how the matter stands. Most likely you was told to look out for the kid, an’ let him slip. Mlle. Marie picked him up on the grounds, an’ is tendin’ him as carefully as if he was her own, which she’s capable of doin’, seein’s she’s the mother of five. Go right into the show, if it so be you’ve got a ticket, and see what’s goin’ on until the performance ends. Then come here, where you’ll find me, an’ I’ll pass you in. That’s all there is to be done, my boy; an’ you’d better follow my advice, ’cause you won’t get him any sooner by goin’ contrary to it. Besides, you don’t want to hang ’round here in the rain; an’ we’re goin’ to have a right smart bit of a shower, unless I’m mistaken.”

Phil had been so engrossed with his grief and remorse as to give no heed to the fact that the storm-clouds were gathering black and ominous, threatening each instant a downpour of rain.

Even now he paid but little attention to the angry-looking sky, but stood silent, trying to decide what course he should pursue.

The guardian at the door had spoken to him in a most friendly tone; and the advice given seemed to be good, in view of the fact that there was no possibility of his effecting an entrance by force.

Almost mechanically he retraced his steps to the entrance of the main tent, where, the doorkeeper recognizing him with a careless nod, he walked slowly through, not with any idea of playing the part of spectator, for all desire of seeing the circus had long since departed, but because there was no better place in which to spend the time which must intervene before he could claim Sam.

Loud strains of music told that the performance had begun; but yet he lingered near the animal cages, hesitating to join the audience lest every finger should be pointed at him as a boy who had deserted his baby brother for the questionable pleasure of carrying water to the circus horses.

While he stood leaning against the wheel of a wagon, a loud, sudden peal of thunder seemed to cause the very earth to tremble, and the caged animals darted to and fro across their narrow prisons in alarm.

Another peal even louder than the first, and then a wail of protest from every rope and pole, as a fierce gust of wind swept down upon the canvas structure.

A flash of lightning which could plainly be seen through the covering of cloth, another angry roar from the heavens which was greeted with a howl

of fear from the occupants of the cages, and then it seemed to Phil as if the tent was lifted high in the air.

He heard the shrill screams of women, the hoarse shouts of men, the sharp flapping of the tent; and in another instant, just as the struggling mass of human beings attempted to force their way toward him, he was enveloped in the folds of the falling canvas.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DISASTER.



It was several seconds before Phil realized that the tents of the "Great and Only," yielding to the enormous pressure of wind suddenly brought to bear upon them, had collapsed, burying spectators and employees alike.

At first he was conscious of being held immovably down, while the pressure above him was so great as to be painful in the extreme.

Then he heard, as if from afar off, owing to the folds of wet canvas which completely covered him, cries of terror from the spectators and the doubly imprisoned animals, while high above all was the roaring of the tempest, now at its full height.

To extricate himself, or even to so much as move a hand, was impossible for the instant; and while he lay thus powerless, there came into his mind the terrible question as to where little Sam might be during this time of peril.

He pictured to himself the baby smothering, dying, under the same heavy pressure which was

upon him ; and he not only realized, but magnified, the consequences of his disobedience to his parents' commands.

For some time he gave no heed to the heavy sound as of blows struck immediately above him with some tiny tool ; and when finally the persistent continuance of these forced his attention, he realized that the rain was falling in torrents.

It was not difficult for him to fancy the terrible scene the tenting grounds must present just at this time.

The first fury of the tempest was by no means the last.

The howling and shrieking of the wind could be heard above the din caused by the animals ; and the wet canvas was tossed up and down violently, inflicting painful blows as it struck Phil's defenceless body.

It was this same buffeting which finally enabled the boy to make his escape from the uncomfortable and even dangerous situation into which he had been thrown.

As the heavy canvas was lifted by the wind, he involuntarily moved to one side or the other in the hope of bettering his position, until he suddenly found himself at the very outermost edge of the covering ; and when the next blast of wind

raised the imprisoning weight, he rolled himself free.

Although not later than three o'clock in the afternoon, a gloom as of twilight had overspread the town; and it was only with difficulty Phil could discern surrounding objects.

The mass of canvas, with ominous bulgings here and there which told of the prisoners beneath it, could plainly be seen because of the fact that it was close at hand; but the gloom and the mist caused by the downpour of rain prevented him from seeing where, but a few moments previous, had stood the smaller tents, the ticket-wagon, booths, or vehicles belonging to the spectators.

He gave no heed to the fact that his clothing was rapidly being saturated with water, but ran hurriedly, with a horrible fear tugging at his heart, toward that portion of the enclosure where the dressing-room had been located.

Now, however, it was impossible for him to find that for which he sought. There was before him only this mass of sodden canvas, from beneath which came deafening cries of agony, fear, or supplication; and in the huge pile one tent could not be distinguished from another.

A man was coming rapidly toward him, carrying an axe, and looking here and there,

as if trying to settle some difficult question in his mind.

Phil ran to meet him, and asked imploringly,—
“Have you seen our Sam since” —

The man passed on as if he neither saw nor heard the boy; and from the profusion of jewellery, and because of his fancy as to how such a personage should appear, Phil believed he was the proprietor of the wrecked circus.

Here a man, or there a woman, crawled from beneath the heavy, stifling weight as the wind raised it momentarily; and to each of these the distressed boy applied for information.

All seemed so thoroughly dazed as to be incapable of a reply.

After what seemed like a very long time, although perhaps not more than two or three minutes had elapsed, the employees of the “Great and Only” were gathered in a small group around the man whom Phil believed was the proprietor; and the boy heard hurried commands given, saw one man and then another depart in different directions until all had dispersed, to return again shortly afterward bearing poles or ropes, and the work of succor had begun.

Some one standing near by called for Phil to aid in the task of raising two poles, at the top of

which a block and tackle were attached, and cursed him for not obeying more quickly; another ordered him to stand aside out of the way if he could be of no assistance; and a third gave yet a different command, so bewildering the boy that he remained silent and motionless, not knowing which way to turn, cowering before the blinding flashes of lighting, or shrinking as the heavy peals of thunder caused the earth to tremble.

Phil had involuntarily taken up his station at the very point where the employees of the "Great and Only" began their work of releasing the imprisoned people; but not until the blocks had been attached to the edge of the canvas, and a certain section of it raised sufficiently to allow what seemed an enormous throng of men, women, and children to walk, stagger, or crawl out, did he fully realize all that was being done.

Then his only thought was that the time had come when he could search for the baby; and he would have made his way beneath this arch of sodden cloth, amid the splintered timbers, fragments of wagons, and litter of gaudy flags, but that he was stopped by cries of agony from a man who lay prostrate upon the ground directly in his path.

"Pull me out of here before that canvas falls

again," the man cried imploringly; and Phil replied, —

"I mustn't stop, because I've got to hunt for Sam. Why don't you walk out?"

"I can't; I am helpless. I believe both legs are broken. Aren't you Phil Barton?"

The boy, arrested by thus hearing his own name at the instant when he would have plunged into the horrible mass in quest of the baby, leaned over the sufferer that he might see him more clearly.

"Don't you know me, Phil? I'm Jacob Merrill."

It was the husband of the old lady who had reproached him for neglecting his duty toward Sam, — the neighbor whose home was next adjoining his; and despite the imperative necessity of searching for the baby, the boy turned all his attention to assisting the aged sufferer.

A strong man would have found it difficult to effect very much in such a place.

The affrighted multitude — some wounded severely, others painfully bruised, all in a panic of terror — were making every effort to escape from their prison of canvas, which was being shaken violently by the wind at imminent risk of again falling upon them, and each selfish to the utmost in this hour of peril.

More than once was Phil thrown to the ground ; many trampled upon the grievously injured old man, yet none save the boy, who had been so derelict in his duty, stayed to lend a helping hand.

Phil tried in vain to raise his neighbor from the ground ; but his strength would not have been sufficient, even had he been unimpeded in the attempt ; and after several unsuccessful efforts, Mr. Merrill said, his voice growing weaker each instant, —

“Try to pull me out of the way, Phil. That is all you can do now.”

“Are you dyin’, Mr. Merrill ?” the boy asked in a tone of terror.

“Broken bones don’t kill so quickly, lad. The pain makes me faint, and I am afraid I shall become unconscious before you can succeed.”

“I’ll get you outside, no matter what happens ; so don’t give up so long as it can be helped, will you ?”

There was no reply. The old man had fainted ; but Phil continued his exertions, struggling now to pull the apparently lifeless body a few inches, and again to prevent the terror-stricken crowd from trampling upon it, until he succeeded in so far effecting a rescue as to drag his helpless neighbor to a place of comparative safety.

To do more was beyond Phil's power; and although it was to leave the old man exposed to the pitiless elements, he returned again in search of Sam.

By this time those of the spectators who were comparatively uninjured had made their way from beneath this portion of the canvas, and now ensued such a scene as brought back to Phil all the sickening fears which had assailed him during the first seconds of the disaster.

The helplessly wounded were being brought out; some in the arms of friends and neighbors, and others on hastily improvised litters, which consisted here of a plain board, or there of the gay-colored trappings of the circus, until it seemed to the boy as if nearly all the residents of Berwick had been disabled.

The horrible thought came in to his mind that if strong men had thus been grievously wounded, how must it be with a helpless child like Sam?

Again and again he shouted the baby's name at the full strength of his lungs; but his voice was hardly more than a whisper as compared with the deafening din, which had not abated one whit in volume.

The tempest increased in force, adding each instant to the list of the disabled; but relief parties,

composed of the circus employees and the uninjured citizens of the town, had by this time been organized, and the work of rescue was now carried on systematically, despite the furious onslaughts of the wind, which threatened to render the efforts of the men unavailing.

Once more Phil searched for the ruins of the dressing-room; and while thus engaged he met a bare-headed boy, whose clothing was torn until it literally hung in rags from his body.

It was but another victim of the tornado; and Phil, having seen many others who had suffered more severely, would have passed him by without a word, but that the dilapidated-looking lad cried hoarsely, —

“Did you find Sam before the tents come down?”

“Is that you, Teddy?”

“It seems somethin’ that way, though I’ve been pretty nigh squeezed out of myself. Did you get hurt any?”

“I wish I had,” Phil replied emphatically. “I’d rather been killed straight out than have to go home an’ tell mother poor little Sam is in there;” and Phil pointed to that portion of the canvas which had not as yet been raised.

“How do you know he’s there?” asked Teddy.

“Well, he must be somewhere around.”

“But then you ain’t certain he was inside?”

“I know he was in the dressing-room with the women; but the man at the door wouldn’t let me go in till after the show was over, and now the poor little baby is killed;” and for the first time since the terrible accident had occurred, Phil gave way to a flood of tears.

Teddy’s usually tender heart reproached him for the impatience he had displayed just prior to the opening of the exhibition; and with his arm around his friend’s neck he said soothingly, forced to shout into Phil’s ear in order that the words might be heard, because the noise of the tempest and the outcries of the sufferers were so great, —

“There’s plenty of folks come out without so much as bein’ scratched, ’cause I’ve seen ’em. Sadie Parker was sittin’ on the same bench with me, an’ wasn’t even shook up a little bit, so why mightn’t Sam be jest as lucky? Women always look out for a youngster, and there was enough in that dressing-room to have taken care of a dozen such babies as yours.”

“That might be,” Phil said between the sobs; “but there ain’t much chance of it. It seems to me everybody what was in the tent got hurt. I dragged old Mr. Merrill out, an’ I guess he’s dead.”

“But that’s no sign Sam ain’t all right. Where is the dressing-room?”

“That’s what I was huntin’ for; but I can’t make it out, ’cause in the first place it’s so dark, an’ then again all this canvas looks alike. Don’t you know where it stood?”

Teddy was so eager to relieve the distress in his friend’s mind as to be for the moment unmindful of the truth; and he replied promptly, —

“Of course I do. It’s over this way. Come on. There’s a crowd gettin’ it up now.”

As he spoke he ran, followed closely by Phil, toward a portion of the canvas which was being raised by the same method used in the first case; and when the two arrived they saw several horses covered with torn and besmirched spangled cloths, which was sufficient evidence that in this place had been located the dressing-room.

“Did they get anybody out of here?” Phil asked eagerly of a man who looked as if he might have just been rescued.

“It seemed to me there was more than a thousand, and nigh on to half of ’em walked directly over me.”

“Did you see a baby — a little fellow about three years old?”

“I didn’t have a chance to see anybody. I was

on one of the top benches near the entrance to the dressing-room. After the concern fell, some boards pinned me down until the bulk of the crowd had got out."

"But our Sam was in the dressing-room, an' I am tryin' to find him."

"Why, look here, you're Elijah Barton's boy, ain't you?"

"Yes," Phil replied meekly.

"Then how did the baby happen to be in the dressing-room of the circus?"

"One of the show-women was takin' care of him while Sadie Parker went to dinner, an' " —

"Oh, I see; had to come to the circus an' never mind anything about the baby, eh? Well, I'm sorry for your mother; though I can't say that much for yourself, if you left the little fellow in there for the show people to look after."

Phil turned away. He knew he deserved reproach; but it seemed the height of cruelty to upbraid him when he was in doubt whether poor little Sam was yet alive.

"There's no need of jumpin' down on a feller when he's in so much trouble," Teddy cried indignantly. "Of course he ought to have looked out for the baby, but by comin' to the circus he wasn't doin' any more than you did."

“I reckon I’ve seen enough of shows to last me as long as I live,” the man replied impatiently, and added, as if half ashamed of what he had said to Phil; “it’s no use for the boy to hunt after his baby now. Them as are hurt will be carried into the nearest houses, an’ if the youngster’s alive some one would have sense enough to take him out of the storm. You’ll have to wait a spell; anyhow till the tornado lets up a bit.”

Teddy looked anxiously around for Phil, and found him a short distance away, tugging at a mass of canvas which bulged in a sinister form.

“What are you tryin’ to do there? You can’t so much as lift one end of that.”

“Look, Teddy!” Phil cried. “There must be somebody underneath, an’ perhaps it’s little Sam!”

“He wouldn’t make half so big a bunch as that; an’ besides, you can’t lift it.”

“But I must. Take hold with me. We can pull it up if we try.”

Teddy struggled manfully to do as his friend desired; and when they had raised the weight which, under other circumstances, would have been impossible for them to so much as move, they found the dead body of a horse, caparisoned for the ring.

“That’s the very one a woman was on when the storm first begun. Jest before the tents went down she rode out, an’ this pole must have dropped on him after he got on the other side of the curtain;” and Teddy pointed to one of the supports of the tent which lay across the neck of the animal.

“Perhaps it was the woman who was taking care of little Sam,” Phil said with a sob.

“Well, s’pose it was! That wouldn’t make it any worse for him. There was plenty others ’round; so this is no proof *he* has been hurt.”

“Teddy, this shows that men, women, and horses were all mixed up together in a place that wasn’t a quarter part as big as the menagerie tent; an’ I don’t believe one of ’em got out alive. If I’d done as mother told me, Sam wouldn’t have been here, an’ it’s all my fault that he’s been killed!”

Throwing himself down on the water-soaked canvas, the conscience-stricken Phil gave himself wholly up to grief; and for several moments no word of cheer was sufficiently strong to arouse him from the despair into which he had fallen.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER THE STORM.



IN his despair and grief, Phil was almost unconscious of the fact that the rain was beating down upon him as furiously as at any time since the tempest began.

Both he and Teddy were drenched to the skin; and Master Dunham speedily became aware of his disagreeable condition, as he remained thus motionless where the wind struck him with its full strength.

“See here, Phil,” he said, as he raised his friend’s head by force; “this won’t do at all, an’ you know it as well as I. In the first place, I don’t believe there’s any more chance of Sam’s being dead than of his bein’ alive; an’ then again, you’re takin’ on as if you was the only one in this town what had any trouble. There must have been a good many people killed; an’ if everybody acted the way you’re doin’, who’d help them that are hurt so bad.”

“There’s nothin’ we can do,” Phil wailed.

“ You can’t tell that till you’ve tried. Almost anything is better than layin’ here cryin’.”

“ But how can I help it ? ”

“ I don’t know as you can, right off ; but there’s nothing to prevent your workin’, ’cause you can cry at the same time. Where did you leave old Mr. Merrill ? ”

“ Over there, close by the fence.”

“ An’ jest as likely as not there hasn’t anybody been near him since. The men in this town have got a big job on hand to straighten things out, an’ you an’ I might help a little by takin’ Mr. Merrill home. He’ll die if he is left here in the storm.”

Even this appeal might have failed to arouse Phil from the lethargy of despair which had come upon him, if Teddy had not literally forced him to rise to his feet, and then insisted on his pointing out where the unfortunate man lay.

They found the old gentleman conscious, but unattended, and suffering severely.

“ I’ve tried to attract attention,” he said in reply to Teddy’s question, “ but the noise is so great that no one appears to have heard me ; and besides, I suppose there are very many in even a worse condition than I am. I ought not to expect assistance until the more seriously injured are cared for.”

“Are you hurt pretty bad?” and Teddy spoke in a cheery tone, as if by such means the sufferer’s mind might be distracted from his own distress.

“I think both legs are broken.”

“What can we do to help you?”

“Are there many injured?”

“It looks as if pretty nigh half the people that was in the show got hurt some way.”

“Then I must depend wholly on you two boys. Since so many are injured, it will likely be a long time before the others can assist me.”

“Of course we ought to take you home,” Teddy said reflectively; “but I don’t see how it’s goin’ to be done unless we can get somebody to help out a little.”

“Isn’t it possible to get a cart or a wheelbarrow? You two cannot carry me.”

“I know where there is a barrow, if you think you could stand it.”

“I would endure almost anything in order to get home,” the old gentleman said with a sob of pain, and then grew suddenly quiet as if consciousness had deserted him once more.

“See here, Phil; go over behind Matthews’s shed, an’ you’ll find a wheelbarrow. We’ll manage to lift him on it somehow, an’ between the two of us get him home.”

“I must be huntin’ for poor little Sam;” and Phil would have gone again in the direction of the wrecked circus, but that Teddy detained him forcibly, as he said sharply, —

“Look here! The men have got everybody out from under that canvas; an’ there’s nothin’ you can do till it stops stormin’, so’s the town can get quieted down. Then we’ll go everywhere askin’ for Sam. Now here’s a chance for you an’ me to help poor Mr. Merrill, who don’t look as if he’d live a great spell longer; an’ you’ll be doin’ what’s a good deal better than walkin’ ’round cryin’.”

“But it seems cruel not to do something towards helpin’ the baby.”

“You know jest as well as I do, Phil Barton, that you *can’t* help him, an’ you *can* do something towards keepin’ Mr. Merrill alive. Now step out an’ get that wheelbarrow like a man! Don’t you see that all the well folks in town have got their hands full helpin’ them as have been hurt, an’ you are the only one who’s willin’ to stand idle cryin’.”

Phil obeyed mechanically. He was suffering so intensely from grief and remorse as hardly to be conscious of what he did; and when he came back with the barrow, he moved and appeared like one in a dream.

“I reckon the poor old man has gone off in kind of a faint,” Teddy explained; “an’ he won’t feel the hurt so much if we lift him in before he gets his senses again. Take hold of his shoulder, and we’ll pull him up that way.”

It was a difficult task to get the inanimate body into the small vehicle, and then dispose it in such a manner that it could be safely conveyed through the streets; but thanks to Teddy’s efforts the work was finally accomplished, and the two boys set out, forced to make a long *détour* before gaining the road, in order to avoid the overturned tents.

Nor were they the only ones engaged in such mournful work. On every hand could be seen dimly, amid the gloom and the mist of the rain, groups composed of three or four men or boys, carrying apparently lifeless burdens, or assisting those of the unfortunates who were yet able to partially help themselves.

“Do you suppose any of ’em has found the baby?” Phil asked, when they were half way across the enclosure; and Teddy replied sharply,—

“You mustn’t think of Sam now, ’cause it won’t do any good. If they’ve found him, we’ll know before dark. Better hurry up, for Mr. Merrill looks as if he was dyin’.”

It was half an hour before the injured man was taken into his own home, and then Mrs. Merrill implored the boys to send a surgeon without delay.

“We’ll do the best we can,” Teddy replied, thinking it necessary to speak in a careless tone; “but you mustn’t get fussed if one doesn’t come for a long spell, ’cause there’s a good many people, too, in this town what are hurt; an’ with nobody but old Dr. Pillsbury to look out for ’em, it seems as though it would be a good while before everybody could be fixed up.”

Mrs. Merrill, eager to relieve her husband’s sufferings, evidently did not hear the last portion of Master Dunham’s remark; and the two boys went out into the street, Phil giving way yet more violently than ever to his grief when they passed his home, for it was as if the building reminded him as strongly as words could have done of his disobedience and its probable results.

“Come now, Phil, brace up! It won’t do any good to take on so, an’ there’s plenty of work for us to do between now an’ night;” and Teddy shook his friend violently. “I don’t reckon we can find a doctor for Mr. Merrill, but perhaps there’s somebody else who can’t get home unless we lend a hand.”

He half dragged, half led, Phil down the street ; and when the two were at the scene of the disaster once more, it was apparent that very much had been done in the way of aiding the unfortunate.

The elements themselves had grown more kindly ; for the rain no longer fell in such volume, and the wind had decreased in force very perceptibly.

The boys would have made their way directly to the spot from which they had come, but that they were stopped by a barrier formed of rope extended from one end of the enclosure to the other, and guarded by several men.

“No one is allowed in here except those who are on duty,” a voice cried, as Teddy would have crawled under the rope ; and Phil recognized it as that of his father’s intimate friend.

“We must get in there, Mr. Hannaford, to hunt for Sam. I wouldn’t have stopped lookin’ except that old Mr. Merrill was most dyin’, an’ we had to carry him home.”

“Was your brother in that tent ?” the man asked sharply ; and Phil fancied he would once more be forced to tell of his neglect of duty, but this was not required of him.

“Yes, sir ; an’ I want to find him.”

“We have as many working here as can be employed profitably, and a crowd of idle ones are to

be avoided. You could do your brother no good, if he is among the injured."

"But he might be somewhere 'round there huntin' for me," Phil suggested feebly.

"There's no chance of that. All the uninjured, except those who are engaged in the work of rescue, are outside these lines by this time. If the baby isn't hurt, he is somewhere in the village."

Then Mr. Hannaford turned to a group of newcomers who were insisting on passing the barriers; and the two boys stood gazing at each other vacantly, until Teddy gained sufficient control of his own feelings to say, —

"Of course what he says is straight; an' so long as there's nothing we can do to help anybody here, we'd better begin to find Sam."

"How are we goin' to do it?"

"Wait till them folks get away, an' I'll talk to Mr. Hannaford; he'll know."

During the time the two boys were carrying Mr. Merrill home, as well as afterward, when they saw so many people bearing ominous-looking burdens, it had become impressed upon Phil's mind that little Sam was dead; and when they found the scene of the disaster taken possession of by the uninjured citizens, with relief parties organized and set at work systematically, there was in

his mind only the thought that now he must wait until the baby's body was carried to his home.

Therefore it was that he was neither animated nor excited by Teddy's proposal.

Now, however, while waiting until it should be possible to speak with Mr. Hannaford, there sprang up in Phil's heart a hope so sudden and great that it seized upon him like a fever.

One of the relief parties had returned from the village; and the leader said, in reply to the question of a bystander, —

“There are none killed so far as we have yet been able to ascertain. Forty are seriously injured, and twice as many badly bruised. That makes up the list of casualties. The damage done to the clothing of the spectators and the property of the circus folks must be very great.”

Almost at the very moment the man was speaking, the rain ceased falling; and for an instant the sun looked out from behind a cloud, his bright rays falling directly upon Phil like a harbinger of hope.

“Nobody killed!” the boy repeated, as if to convince himself the joyful intelligence was true. “Did you hear that, Teddy?”

“Of course I did. You've been makin' up your mind that pretty nigh everybody was dead, jest

'cause you couldn't find Sam. But things are gettin' straightened out — there's Mr. Hannaford alone now ;” and advancing a few paces, Master Dunham briefly stated the circumstances of the loss of the baby, and asked his advice as to what should be done.

“It will be impossible for some time to ascertain definitely who has been injured, because many of the wounded were carried into the neighboring buildings or to their homes. The proper course for you boys is to make a house-to-house search. Whether the little fellow was taken out injured, or safe and sound, he would, in the absence of his parents, be given over to the care of some of the neighbors. It ought not take a very long time to ascertain all the facts.”

Phil hardly waited for the gentleman to cease speaking before he started in the direction of the village; and as Teddy followed he cried sharply:—

“Now you're goin' to rush 'round jest as you did before, an' won't half do the work. Let's begin at the first house we come to, an' tackle every one on both sides of the street.”

“Perhaps he's home this very minute.”

“Well, now you know better than that. Ain't your father an' mother away, an' the house locked?”

“Phil suddenly slackened his pace, as if to signify that his friend should take charge of the business in hand; and this Master Dunham promptly proceeded to do.

“You go on that side of the road, an’ I’ll take this. Don’t wait at a house only long enough to ask if they know anything about Sam; ’cause we may have to hunt a good while before we find him, an’ this job must be finished by the time your father an’ mother get home.”

The house-to-house search was begun; and when half an hour had elapsed without any information having been gained, the hope which had so suddenly come into Phil’s heart grew very faint.

The replies to the eager questioning of the boys were the same; no one had seen the baby, and each person appeared to be so preoccupied with his own suffering, or that of his neighbor, that but little sympathy was extended.

There was so much sorrow and suffering among the citizens of Berwick that for the time being no one appeared to take any especial interest in those cases of distress where they were not immediately concerned.

“We never will find him!” Phil wailed, again giving way to despair.

“You won’t unless you stick right at the work.

Of course he's somewhere in town, an' we're bound to come across him pretty soon. Here's where Sadie Parker lives. Do you suppose any of her folks was hurt?"

Phil went quickly toward the house. The fact that he had given the baby over to Sadie's care made it appear to him as if she should be the one who could give the latest information regarding Sam, and he knocked impatiently at the door.

It was opened by the girl herself; and because her eyes were swollen as if with much weeping, Phil immediately believed she was grieving for little Sam.

"Is the baby hurt much?" he asked tremulously.

"I don't know. I haven't seen him. Where was he found?"

"I thought he might be here. Teddy and I are asking at every house for him."

"I haven't seen him. Our Henry's arm is broken, and he's suffering terribly while we're waiting for Dr. Pillsbury to come."

Then Sadie's tears began to flow anew, and Phil turned away in disappointment.

Like many others in Berwick on that day, his grief was so great as to prevent him from extending sympathy.

The searchers' next stopping-place was at the post-office; and here were congregated several citizens, discussing in all its details the terrible disaster which had visited the community.

"No; I haven't heard anything about your baby," the postmaster said in reply to Teddy's question. "If he was hurt, most likely his name would have been among them that was sent to the papers. I've jest come from the telegraph-office, an' they're rushin' the news out as fast as it can be learned. It all come so suddenlike that it seems as if pretty nigh everybody who hadn't been injured was too much dazed to know anything."

"And there's little wonder at it," one of the bystanders added. "I was in the big tent myself; an' I tell you when that canvas come down, wet, and heavy as so much iron, it knocked the senses out of me. I do hear, though, that nobody was killed; and I guess old Jacob Merrill got hurt worst. Both his legs are broken, an' at his time of life that's a pretty serious matter."

"What beats me," another said speculatively, "is how all them tents could have come down so quick in a thunder-gust."

"Did you call that blow a thunder-gust?" the postmaster asked. "It come pretty nigh bein' a

tornado, accordin' to my way of lookin' at it. You see, it was mighty hot up to the time the clouds began to gather, and I reckon every rope was slack. Once the wind got in under the tents, an' begun to lift 'em, the mischief was done. It'll be a long day before the people of this town can be persuaded to go to another circus."

"And it will take a good while for that show to get on the road again, judgin' from the appearance of things when I left," the man who had been in the wreck added. "It seemed to me as if pretty nigh everything was stove to pieces."

"I should have thought there might have been a chance for the animals to get out."

"They were mighty careful about that, I noticed. The canvas of the menagerie tent wasn't pulled up in any such shape as the others, but handled gently. You must say this for the circus people, — that they've worked like beavers to straighten things out. I'm told every man who had charge of the animals jumped right toward the cages before he knew whether the beasts had got loose or not. Joe Hanson says that the menagerie part of the show got the lightest part of the blow. The most mischief was done to the stables. Eleven horses killed outright, and a dozen or more hurt so badly they'll have to be shot."

Phil did not wait to hear any further details. It was of little concern to him how much damage had been done, while he was yet in doubt as to the baby's safety.

"It seems to me folks don't make any account of poor little Sam," he said to Teddy when they were on the street once more. "He might be killed a dozen times over, an' nobody would care."

"Why do you want to keep talkin' about his bein' dead? Accordin' to all accounts, there wasn't anybody killed; an' if Sam was hurt bad we'd have heard it long before this."

"Then, where is he?" Phil asked fiercely. "This town ain't so big but that we ought to have heard of him before this."

"Wait till we've been over it once before you talk like that. We shall come across him pretty soon, if we keep at the work. Now let's start in, an' not stop till the job is finished;" and Teddy set the example by knocking at the door of the dwelling next adjoining the post-office.

CHAPTER VI.

REPENTANCE.



WHEN in the course of their search the two boys had arrived in the vicinity of the Barton home, a sudden thought came into the mind of Phil, adding not a little to his troubles.

“Suppose father and mother have come back?” he said in a low, tremulous tone. “I was in hopes I could find poor little Sam, and have him in the house when they got here.”

“It ain’t likely they’ve left your Aunt Hannah’s yet; ’cause they wasn’t countin’ on comin’ till night, an’ wouldn’t start in such a storm as we’ve been having. There’s no call to borrow trouble about that. You locked the doors, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you’d better unlock ’em now; ’cause we may be gone a good while, an’ it wouldn’t do to make your folks hang ’round outside in case they should get here sooner than we expect.”

“But mother always wants the doors kept locked.”

“That’s ’cause she’s ’fraid somebody will come in an’ steal; but I tell you, Phil, there’s nobody in Berwick mean enough to do anything like that on such a day as this has been.”

Phil turned the key in the lock, and then ran hurriedly down the steps.

In his present frame of mind the untenanted building was suggestive of a tomb, and he would not willingly even so much as have looked into it.

The boys continued their search industriously, Teddy forcing his companion on when he gave way to despair and would have yielded wholly to his grief, and by sunset nearly every dwelling in Berwick had been visited; but no tidings of little Sam were gained.

Now even Master Dunham himself was disheartened; and he exclaimed, as the two stood on the outskirts of the town, their task completed, —

“I declare, I don’t know what to make of this thing! It seems like as if your Sam couldn’t have been in that tent nohow, else we would have heard of him before this, ’cause I’m certain we’ve asked everybody in the village.”

“But he *was* in the tent,” Phil cried in a grief-stricken tone. “That doorkeeper told me so; an’

if it hadn't been for him I could have got the poor little fellow out before the storm came up."

"Then, where is he now?" and Teddy spoke as if believing his friend could answer his question.

"He's lost! I tell you he's lost, an' we'll never see him again!" Phil replied with difficulty, for the sobs were coming thick and fast.

"Well, s'pose he is? He's bound to be somewhere, ain't he? He couldn't have got out of this town, could he?"

"If he didn't, why don't we find him?"

"That's what beats me! Now, see here, Phil, we know Sadie Parker left him about twelve o'clock; then the doorkeeper told you he was in the tent less than ten minutes before the storm came on, so it's proved he must be here. There's something we ought to done, but haven't."

"We've asked at every house in the village."

"Yes, it seems as though that was true; but yet we know it ain't, else we'd have heard of him. We didn't go to the mill."

"But nobody's workin' there to-day."

"I know it; yet we had no business to miss a single place — by gracious, Phil, we didn't ask at the hotel!"

"Of course not, 'cause the folks wouldn't take our Sam there."

“That’s jest where you may be makin’ a mistake. So long as your father an’ mother ain’t at home, where *could* he be carried, when all the neighbors have got as much trouble as they can stagger under?”

Teddy was now thoroughly excited, believing he had hit upon the only place where the baby would be found; but Phil displayed no animation. Although it seemed impossible little Sam could have been taken from the village, he was firmly convinced the child was not in Berwick.

Master Dunham, believing he was on the right trail at last, literally forced his friend to accompany him at a swift pace until, breathless and panting, the two stood in the office of the hotel.

The room was filled with citizens and *attachés* of the circus, all discussing the late disaster; and it was some time before Teddy found an opportunity to speak with the proprietor.

When at last he succeeded, instead of asking the question which had been repeated so often by himself and Phil during the afternoon, he said:—

“Little Sam Barton must have been brought here by a woman what belongs to the circus. He was with her in the dressing-room jest before the tents blowed down, an’ of course he’s in the house. Phil an’ I have come for him.”

“How did he happen to be with the show people?” the landlord asked curiously.

In the fewest possible words Teddy explained why the baby was left to the care of a stranger, and concluded by saying, —

“We’re bound to get him right away, Mr. Haley, ’cause Phil’s folks will be home pretty soon. Where is he?”

“Bless your soul, my boy, I don’t know. I didn’t have an idea he was anywhere ’round here. In fact, I never heard that he was among the missing.”

“But he *is* missin’, an’ he’s here. Now, where is the woman?”

“Do you know what her name is?”

“Of course not, but she’s one of the show folks.”

“All the circus women in the house are on the second floor, but I haven’t seen Barton’s baby there.”

Teddy did not wait for further information. Urging Phil on by tugging at his coat-sleeve, he hurried up the stairs, and on the second floor stopped at the first door and knocked.

When it was opened he asked, —

“Where’s the baby what was in the dressing-room this afternoon?”

“Mlle. Marie had him with her a few moments ago in Number 14.”

“What did I tell you?” Teddy cried triumphantly, as he slapped Phil on the shoulder with no slight force; and without waiting for a reply immediately began to search for Number 14.

Owing to the gloom in the hallway it was several moments before he found the desired apartment; but once in front of the door he knocked imperatively, and a voice responded, —

“Come in.”

Teddy entered; and before he was fairly inside the room, Phil darted past him, crying hysterically as he ran toward the bed on which a child lay sleeping peacefully, —

“O Sam! Sam! I have found you, and you ain’t dead!”

“He hasn’t received so much as a scratch, which is more than might be said had he remained with you,” a motherly-looking woman replied in a matter-of-fact tone as Phil threw himself on his knees in front of the bed. “I expected you would have come for him long before this; his mother must be anxious.”

“We didn’t know where you was, ma’am; an’ Sam’s mother is out of town, though it’s about time she was back,” Teddy replied; and then it

suddenly occurred to him that he presented rather a disreputable appearance, bare-headed, and with his clothes hanging in rags.

“Were you in the tents when they blew down?” Mlle. Marie asked, moving a short distance away from where Phil was alternately laughing and crying over the baby.

“Indeed I was; an’ I s’pose I’d oughter put on some different clothes long before this. But Phil was most crazy about poor little Sam; and I didn’t want to let him go off by himself, ’cause he wasn’t fit to do anything. We’ve been huntin’ for you ever since the trouble began.”

“We came directly to the hotel as soon as it was possible to make our way out from under the canvas, and I have wondered not a little why some one did not claim the baby.”

Then Teddy explained all they had done in the way of searching for the missing child; and by the time he concluded his story, Phil was sufficiently calm to understand what was said to him.

“You should take the baby home at once,” Mlle. Marie said as she kissed little Sam affectionately. “His mother will be nearly frantic with grief if she comes back and he isn’t there.”

“You’ve been mighty good to look out for him so well,” said Teddy.

“I was glad of the opportunity, my boy, to be of some service in the terrible misfortune which has come upon us; and if I have saved one mother’s baby from injury I am truly thankful. Now you had better take the little fellow home without delay.”

Phil no longer thought Sam a heavy burden; but, raising him in his arms, staggered out of the room, with a hymn of thanksgiving in his heart that his brother’s life had been spared.

Little Sam was too sleepy to talk of the many wonderful things he had seen while in the dressing-room of the circus, even had Phil questioned him; and the rescuers and rescued went rapidly and silently toward the Barton home, until an exceedingly happy thought, as he believed, came into Teddy’s mind. He said abruptly:

“I reckon your folks’ll make a terrible row when they find that the baby was with the circus woman so long.”

“Of course they will.”

“An’ you’ll most likely catch it hot for goin’ away from the house.”

“The very worst father can do won’t be bad enough after what I did,” Phil replied stoutly. “Now that the baby is all right, I’ll be almost glad if I get a whipping.”

Teddy indulged in a prolonged whistle, expressive of surprise or incredulity, it would be difficult to say which.

“It’s a fact,” Phil added earnestly. “I had no business to lug this little chap down to the circus grounds, no matter how much I wanted to see the show, even if mother hadn’t told me to stay at home. But when she talked to me ’bout what I must do, I was all the time thinkin’ I’d go with you. It wouldn’t been quite so bad if I’d said right up an’ down that I wasn’t goin’ to mind her; but to sneak away as I did, tryin’ to make myself believe I couldn’t keep the baby quiet at home, was awful mean, an’ I oughter pay for it.”

“Of course it ain’t any business of mine, an’ if you’re achin’ so bad for a whippin’ it would be tough if you didn’t get it. I was only thinkin’ you might keep this whole business quiet if you felt that way.”

“How could I keep it quiet?”

“By holdin’ your tongue. There’s been so many people hurt to-day that folks won’t think of talkin’ ’bout a baby’s bein’ lost, ’cause, as it’s turned out, it don’t ’mount to much of anything. You’ll get home before your father an’ mother do, so they can’t know but you’ve been there all day.”

“I wouldn’t do that, not if I knew for certain

they'd never find out I was lyin'," Phil said very decidedly. "I've been the meanest kind of a sneak ever since last night, an' the sooner I pay for it the quicker I'll begin to feel better."

"Well, I reckon you'll have a high old time of it to-night, if that's all you're hankerin' after," Teddy said with an assumption of carelessness; and then he dismissed the subject by offering to carry the baby a portion of the way.

"I'd rather keep him," Phil replied as he pressed little Sam yet more closely. "It seems like as if he'd been dead, an' was only just come to life. If he weighed a hundred pounds I'd hold on to him."

"Perhaps you don't want me to go any farther with you?" Teddy suggested after what seemed a long time of silence.

"Of course I do. If it hadn't been for you I wouldn't have found poor little Sam so quick. It seemed as if I didn't know how to go to work; but you made me stick right to one plan, else I'd been runnin' 'round town this very minute, an' he in the hotel waitin' for me."

"You did get kinder foolish, an' that's a fact," Teddy replied quietly; "but you wasn't the only one in Berwick what got mixed up over the wreck. I guess we'll see a good deal of the circus before it is ready to leave."

“It don't seem to me as if I ever wanted to look at a show again, after all that's happened.”

“That's 'cause you ain't feelin' jest right. Wait till to-morrow, an' you'll be there with the rest of us fellows, watchin' the circus folks straightenin' theirselves out.”

Phil was quite positive it would be a pain rather than a pleasure to revisit the place where he had suffered so much mental anguish, but he did not attempt to argue the question.

His mind was fully occupied with the problem of how he could best atone for his disobedience; and all else, save the happy fact that the baby was in his arms once more, seemed of little importance.

When the boys arrived at the Barton home everything was as it had been left an hour previous; and Teddy remarked carelessly, —

“Your folks haven't come yet. I knew they wouldn't think of ridin' in the storm. Now, if you want to keep quiet 'bout this thing, you've got a great chance.”

“But I don't. I'll tell mother the whole story just as soon as she gets here.”

“All right; that's your business, not mine. Say, shall you be over to the house in the mornin'?”

“I don’t know. Where are you goin’ now?”

“Home; an’ I reckon it’s about time. The folks will think something happened to me if I don’t show up mighty soon.”

“Of course you must go; I forgot you hadn’t seen your mother since the tents blew down. Why can’t you come back after a while? I’d like to have you stay till father an’ mother get home.”

“I reckon I can if you want me bad. I didn’t know but you’d rather be alone to think ’bout the whalin’ you’re likely to get.”

“I’d sooner have some one with me,” Phil replied meekly.

“All right; I’ll be back in a jiffy!” and Master Dunham hurried away as his friend and the baby entered the house.

Ten minutes later, when Teddy returned, the Barton home presented a more cheerful appearance. Phil had lighted the lamps, built a fire in the cook-stove, and done all he could toward preparing supper.

Little Sam, partially undressed, was sleeping peacefully in the kitchen rocking-chair which had been converted into a couch by a liberal use of pillows, while his brother worked industriously at whatever he fancied his mother would wish should be done.

“This don't look much the way it does over to our house,” Teddy said in a tone of approval. “We've got four women there what were in the wreck; an' I guess they're likely to stay till mornin', 'cause all of 'em live quite a piece out in the country, an' their wagons were stove.”

“Had your mother been worryin' about you?”

“No; Sadie Parker stopped while she was goin' to the doctor's, an' give her all the news. I don't believe she'd fussed very much if Sadie hadn't happened along, 'cause there's such a string of people 'round. Are you tryin' to get supper?”

“I thought I'd put the tea on, so's it would be hot when mother come; an' that's about all I can do, except set the table.”

While Phil worked, Teddy repeated what he had heard concerning the disaster during his brief visit home; but his friend did not give the recital that attention which Master Dunham thought it demanded, and he said impatiently, —

“It seems as if you don't care a snap how many folks were hurt, now that Sam is out of the scrape.”

“I do care, Teddy; but just now I can't think of very much except that the baby is here at home with me, where he would have been all day if I'd done what was right, an' — hark!”

The rumbling of carriage-wheels had attracted Phil's attention, and a moment later he was standing in the doorway laughing hysterically as his mother descended from the vehicle.

Then he was clasped fervently in her arms, as she whispered, —

“I told your father, Philip, immediately after we learned the terrible news, that we need have no fear regarding the baby, for you would remain at home all day, knowing it was our desire.”

How happy Phil would have been if he could truthfully have said he had obeyed her strictly! But it was necessary to undeceive her, unless he was determined to follow Master Dunham's advice; and he cried quickly, eager to tell the disagreeable story as soon as possible, —

“I didn't stay at home, mother! I did just what you thought I wouldn't, an' poor little Sam was lost all the afternoon!”

Mrs. Barton appeared terrified for an instant, and then as she saw the baby, turned questioningly to the penitent boy.

Without any attempt to excuse himself, Phil told the whole story, saying in conclusion, —

“Nothin' can make me feel worse than I did while I was layin' under the canvas thinkin' perhaps poor little Sam was dyin' or dead, an' all

through me. Now that he's been found, I don't believe I can cry a bit, no matter how much father whips me, 'cause I'm feelin' so glad."

Greatly to Phil's surprise, his mother kissed him, and then took the baby in her arms without a single word of reproof, Master Dunham staring at her meanwhile as if doubting the evidences of his own senses.

He had fully expected to see Phil punished severely as soon as the story was told; and, just for a moment, he felt really disappointed — not that he wished his friend should suffer, but because it seemed to be the only possible conclusion to what he believed was a needless confession.

A few moments later, while Mrs. Barton was silently rejoicing over the safety of her baby, Master Dunham took his departure; and just outside the door he halted to whisper to Phil, who had accompanied him thus far, —

"It don't look much like you was goin' to get that floggin' after all the fuss; your mother is actin' jest as the women did what were in the wreck. Perhaps she'll come 'round into shape by an' by, an' then you'll catch it so much the stronger because she didn't start in the first thing."

Phil made no reply, and Teddy walked away whistling cheerily.

It was not until noon on the following day that the two friends met again, and then they were among the large throng of spectators who stood idly by while the employees of the "Great and Only" labored industriously to repair the damage done by the storm.

"Hello! I thought you never wanted to see this show again?" Teddy cried as he suddenly discovered Phil near him.

"It seemed that way last night; but when father said I might come down for a little while it seemed foolish to miss the chance."

"Did you get a floggin' last night?"

"No."

"What? Did your father let you off after your tellin' 'bout the whole scrape?" and Master Dunham's eyes were opened wide with astonishment.

"What he said to me was worse than anything else could have been, an' if" —

"I reckon he talked mighty rough."

"Indeed he didn't; he was a good deal nicer than I deserved, an' that was what made me feel meaner than if I'd been whipped. You better believe, Teddy Dunham, that I'll be careful after this to do as I'm told! S'pose poor little Sam had been killed, an' through my fault?"

"But he wasn't, so what's the use talkin' 'bout

it? I did think your father was a square kind of a man; but it don't look much that way, if he let you off with nothin' but a lot of talk, what can't hurt anybody;" and Master Dunham turned away with a gesture of disapprobation.



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