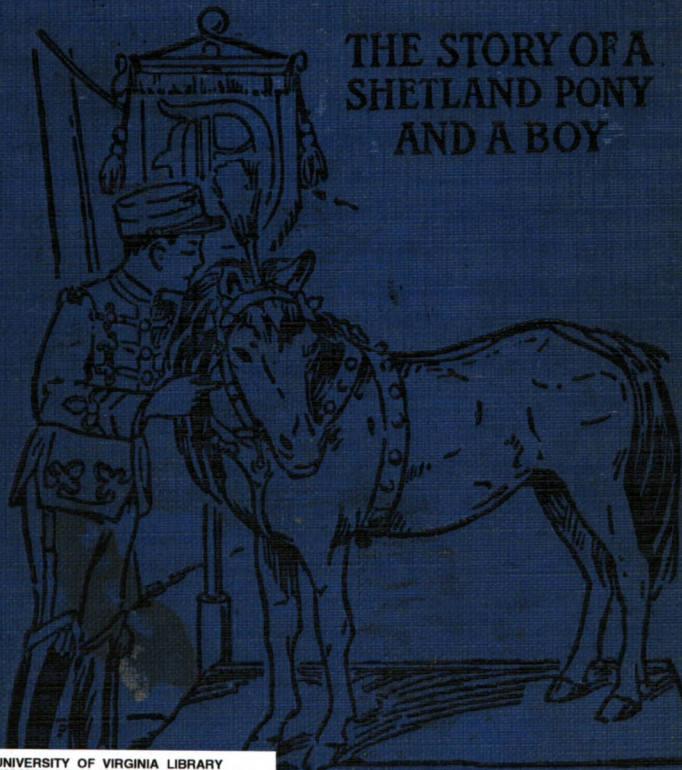


DAPPLES OF THE CIRCUS

THE STORY OF A
SHETLAND PONY
AND A BOY



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DAPPLES OF THE CIRCUS

**The Story of a Shetland
Pony and a Boy**

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The Story of a Shetland Pony and a Boy

By

CLARENCE HAWKES

*Author of "Big Brother, The Bear," Silversheene,
King of Sled Dogs."*

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Dapples of the Circus

*To all who love the musical
creak of saddle leather, and the
rhythmic sound of galloping
hoofs, this book is fraternally
dedicated*

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INTRODUCTION

THE HOME OF THE SHETLAND PONY

THE home of the Shetland pony is the Shetland Islands, a group of about a hundred sea-girt, wind-swept islands, situated in the North Sea about fifty miles northeast of the north of Scotland. These lonely islands together with the Orkneys, which are much nearer the mainland, form one of the shires, or counties, of Scotland.

These islands were inhabited many centuries ago by those little dark people called the Picts. Much has been written about them, but they have so many legends and myths surrounding them, that they belong partly to fairy-land, although they were a real people who flourished many centuries ago on these strange islands. But finally the Norsemen, who were much larger and stronger, came to the islands

and drove out the Picts. The islands were also settled by the Scots, so that to-day the real Shetlander is a mixture of Pict, Norse, and Scotch.

These people are a very simple folk, who follow the sea from June until September, the herring fisheries of the islands being the most important industry.

The main island of Shetland is about fifty miles in length, but it is so indented with voes, or bays, and so irregular that nowhere is the inland farm more than three miles from the sea.

This island of Shetland is the largest of the one hundred islands that form the Shetland group. Its seacoast is as wild and weird as nature could well make it. The winds and the waves have been hammering away at the coast-line for untold ages, and their workmanship is very wonderful. Thus it is that one sees caves and grottoes along the coast. Great pillars of solid rock, called drongs, stand far out at sea, rearing their heads like the giants of

old. Natural gates of solid rock often guard the narrow waterways that lead to some voe where a native town is located.

The country also abounds with strange tales of the Picts and the old Vikings, of the haunts of fairies and witches, so it is altogether an eerie place.

Twenty-seven of the islands of this group are inhabited, while there are about seventy which are used only for grazing the diminutive horses, cattle, and sheep, for all the domestic animals on these islands are very small, like the Shetland pony, so well known to us.

From very ancient times these little horses have existed on the Shetland Islands, just as the little cows and sheep have, but it is only within the last seventy years that they have been exported in large numbers. But not all Shetland ponies are so fortunate as those which find their way to America and England, to become the much-adored companions of children, for many of them find their way

into the mines, where they have to work very hard down in the dark and the dampness.

When we speak of a child's pony, we usually refer to the Shetland, although there are two other kinds which are important and much in demand. But the Shetland, because he is the smallest, is the favorite. The Welsh pony, which has existed in a wild state in the mountains of Wales for the past two thousand years, is the next larger of the ponies, while the high-stepping dandy, the Hackney, is the largest of the three. He is usually about fourteen hands high, and is only one step removed from a real horse.

The true Shetland is from nine to twelve hands high, that is, from thirty-six to forty-eight inches. A hand, which is the unit of measurement for the height of a horse, be he large or small, is four inches. The weight of the Shetland pony is anywhere from two hundred and fifty pounds to four hundred, or even more if he is very

fat. He is not a plaything, but a real little horse. His build is that of a dray-horse, being very blocky.

Some horse-fanciers, such as Colonel Balfour, have succeeded, by long breeding, in making a more slender Shetland. This is the type of pony usually seen in the ring, or horse show. Such a little beauty is Silver Tip, Second, who is valued at ten thousand dollars.

These little ponies are very clever and easily taught tricks, so from the early centuries old writings tell of the trick ponies which were shown at the country fairs in old England and on the Continent.

The life of the Shetland pony on his native heath is anything but the rosy path that he treads once he is imported and becomes a child's pet. Not only are these islands cold, but their vegetation is also scant. The islanders take much better care of their small sheep and cattle than of their ponies.

These little horses are very hardy, and

much exposure has developed a long, thick coat, so that in Shetland they are left out all winter long and made to paw the snow away from their scant feed. This is so scarce on the moor that they usually come down to the seashore and paw in the snow for seaweed and mosses.

The little colts are foaled in the spring and allowed to run with the mares, often till they are a year old. So it is not a strange thing for a Shetland colt who is only six months old to be out in the bitter winter cold, shivering at the flank of his dam. The Shetland pony when foaled weighs only about thirty pounds, and is a very awkward little horse, all legs and head, but he shapes up rapidly.

The most common colors of Shetlands are black, gray, white, and brown, although the English breeders have produced some fine dapple bays and other fancy colors.

For his size and weight the Shetland pony is the most wonderful little animal

that has ever been taught to labor for man. His strength and endurance are remarkable. His willingness also is endless. Be kind to him, and he will give you all the strength and speed there is in him. He will pull a load several times his own weight, or will travel light for hours at his steady, even, mincing trot, his head up, his heavy mane and tail floating out to the breeze, and his entire manner plainly saying, "Don't you see how important I am? I am working for my little friends."

Although the gentlest and the most lovable and loving little chap imaginable, when trained, yet the wild ponies of Shetland often take on the character of their hard environment. Among themselves the stallions often fight terrible battles, which occasionally end in the death of one of the combatants.

Is it any wonder that they become hard like their lives when we consider how they are left to shift for themselves in winter? Even if they are sometimes sheltered and

fed, yet it will be in an open shed where a domestic, full-sized horse would freeze. Their feed, when they are lucky enough to be fed at all, is only what the cattle and sheep leave. But for the better part of the year they shift for themselves, and survive or perish as fate wills. They are mere shadows of their usual plump selves when the spring at last comes and the scant feed appears on the moor.

Is it not wonderful that these little horses, reared in hardship, so soon adapt themselves to the ways of civilized men? This is perhaps why they take so kindly to petting and return so much gratitude for what is done for them by their little masters.

Under the saddle, or harnessed to the phaeton, they are equally willing. Once they become attached to their small owners, they take a certain pride in their little friends, and seem to develop a great sense of responsibility.

In these days of machines, when so

much is artificial, what better playmate could children have than one of these little horses? Learning to care for him and to drive him under all conditions, develops character as almost nothing else will. It teaches the child to be kind, thoughtful, and self-reliant. All that one may need to know about a large horse may be learned from driving this little animal. The child who can ride a Shetland gracefully need not fear a larger mount. The child who can guide him successfully under all conditions by the rein, can, when he is older and stronger, drive any horse.

But the Shetland's best trait is his affection for his little friends. He will watch for their coming as eagerly as a dog. He will nicker at their approach, and nuzzle their hands with genuine affection when they finally appear.

In the harness he is the very soul of fidelity. He will go and go till he drops, and even then will wish that he had more strength and horse love to give.

So if you wish to make the children happy and at the same time develop their character; if you wish to have them learn to be kind, self-reliant, and happy, give them a Shetland pony. He will show them more country and give them more perfectly safe adventures than any other investment of an equal size.

Besides all this, he will show them fidelity and patience, and will find his way into their child hearts and teach them love, which is the greatest of all human treasures.

For a perfect picture of the Shetland, in all his small horse charm, I refer you to that wonderful horse book, "Black Beauty," and the chapter on Little Merrylegs. It will do your heart good to read about him, and to know how wonderful and lovable these little horses really are.

DAPPLES OF THE CIRCUS

CHAPTER I

THE RIVALS

AT the time of our story there dwelt in the northern part of the Island of Shetland a Norwegian named Hans Pederson. He and his good wife and their two children, Hans, aged ten, and Olga, aged eight, comprised the family. By that I mean the human family; but the cattle and sheep often wandered into the house at the back door, or even a small colt might be taken in to carry him safely over a cold spell.

Most of the people on the island were either Norwegian, or Dutch, or descendants from the Norse or Picts, but so blended by time that they were a sort of new race, the Shetlander of to-day.

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Hans Pederson's farm boasted about twenty Shetland ponies, four cows, and fifty sheep. Like most of the islanders, Hans also owned a fishing smack, and from June until September he was off with the fishing fleets of the island. This left the farm in the care of his good wife and the boy and girl, so the two children became very expert little farmers.

They knew all the ponies, the cattle, and even the sheep. They could do almost anything with the stock that their father could. They knew every acre of the farm, both in the hills and on the moors. The farm was like most of those in Shetland, scant of soil and generously sprinkled with rocks. In fact, much of the soil had to be made by carting on sods and seaweed, the latter being also used for fertilizer.

Three years before the opening of my story, there had been foaled at the Pederson farm a Shetland colt which afterwards gained the name of Black Fury. This was

because of his bad temper. Shetlands are usually very amiable little horses, but there is occasionally a stallion that gets rather wild and often vicious. But the thing that caused Black Fury's bad temper was jealousy. He had a rival in the little herd of mares, and this seemed to make him furious.

All had gone well with Black Fury until he was a year old. Then his master had decided to import a better-bred stallion in hopes that he might improve his breed of little horses. Accordingly, he sent to the celebrated stables of Colonel Balfour, whose breed of Shetlands is known the world over. A month or two later the new stallion arrived. He was only a year old, just the age of Black Fury, who had not even gained this name at the time, but was called Blackie.

There was much excitement on the farm when Mr. Pederson drove away to town to get the new pedigreed pony. The children were still more excited as the farmer

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returned with a large box, taking up nearly the whole of the small wagon.

When the box was finally unloaded and they got their first peep at the new horse, the children knew at once that he would be their favorite for all time. He was a wonderful little dapple bay. His coat was short, the result of much clipping and breeding for a short coat. This was in glaring contrast to the long, shaggy, rather sorry coats of the island ponies.

The newcomer was a thoroughbred in every way. He was much slighter of build than the native stock, and this made him look more like a real horse. His mane and tail were very heavy and glossy black. His eyes were large and soft, and he was as loving and gentle as a lamb.

Hans at once climbed upon his back, while Olga put her arms about his neck and laid her face against his cheek. All of which the sleek little horse took very much as a matter of course.

“ Oh, isn't he a beauty! ” cried Olga excitedly. “ What shall we call him? ”

“ His registered name, ” said Mr. Pederson, “ is Sir Wilton Second, but I think we had better call him Dapple Dandy. ” This name fitted him so well that it stuck. So to the children and the neighbors he was always Dapple Dandy, but to men who came to the farm to buy horses, he was Sir Wilton Second.

The Pedersons at once took the newcomer into the family. He was given a stall in an open shed, which was really palatial for a Shetland pony. But it did not seem to impress him very much. If they could have seen the box stall from which he had been taken when he was crated and sent to the island, they would not have wondered at his indifference.

The children spent all their playtime with him. They rode him horseback, and they fed and watered him, in fact, took the entire care of him, after getting their instructions from their father.

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It happened about a week after the arrival of Dapple Dandy, that Blackie wandered in from the hills to see what was going on at the house.

The first thing that met his eyes was the new colt in the yard, and the children, who had been in the habit of petting him, were playing with the stranger. This at once aroused Blackie's anger. He trotted up to the newcomer and sniffed noses with him. Sir Wilton was very affable and did not put on many airs, but Blackie divined at once that he considered himself much superior to the rusty-black, shaggy Shetland from the hills, so he unceremoniously nipped Sir Wilton in the face.

Dapple Dandy drew back in astonishment. He had never been treated so rudely before. He had been trying to be nice, and this rowdy had nipped him. It was beyond his understanding, so he turned his head away and would not even look at Blackie.

This was unfortunate, for it put him at

a disadvantage, so he did not see the next move of the small savage from the hills.

Before any one even guessed his intent, Blackie wheeled and lashed out at Sir Wilton with both his heels, one of which struck him in the chest.

At this point in the strange scene, Mr. Pederson, who had been watching from the shed, came out with a whip and drove the fuming Blackie away, while he carefully examined Sir Wilton's chest to discover if he had been injured.

"Is he hurt?" cried the children in the same breath.

"No, I guess not," replied their father; "but I don't want that black imp kicking him in that way every day."

"Why did he do it?" asked Hans.

"He recognized a future rival among the mares. It is the way of stallions. I am sorry that he is so spiteful. I am afraid we'll have trouble if we try to keep both horses on the range when they grow up. But perhaps it will blow over."

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Instead, from that day the two little horses were deadly rivals. Not that Dapple Dandy carried the war as far as did his rival. He simply defended himself as well as he could. But the hatchet was never buried. War between them always existed until the fatal winter twilight when they fought that desperate battle to the death in a little pocket far up among the hills.

CHAPTER II

THE BATTLE

BECAUSE of the jealousy between Blackie and the newcomer, Blackie was seen less and less around the farm buildings, and Dapple Dandy was very loath to leave and go with the rest of the colts to the hills for feed.

But it must be understood that most of the jealousy and hatred was on the side of Black Fury. He was not so refined or so much of a gentleman as his sleek relative from the Colonel Balfour stables.

For the first few days the children had to feed Sir Wilton to keep him from starving. They fed him the black oats and small flint corn and barley raised in the island. He did not much relish it, since it was not as sweet as the feed he was used to, but the children, by much petting and

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coaxing, whetted his appetite. The keen winds and the bracing air of the island also played an important part, so he gradually got used to his coarse feed. His first journeys away from the farm buildings were on the moor, where he went to graze with the strange little sheep that pastured there. These sheep were about half the size of ordinary sheep, but as lively as fleas. This Dapple Dandy discovered when he tried to chase them. The moors were intersected with ditches, which were partly filled with water. This was necessary, to keep them dry enough so that the stock could feed upon them. These ditches the sheep would jump like deer, and Sir Wilton soon learned to jump them, too.

The feed on the moors was not very appetizing. It consisted of rushes, reeds, and a thick lush or marsh grass, with some tender mosses which the sheep would eat, but which Dapple Dandy did not fancy.

But the new colt did not even go on the

moors of his own accord, for the children had to drive him there each day. He had never had to work for his oats, and he did not see why he should now. To him life had always been one long holiday, with nothing to do but take the good things that came his way, and occasionally kick up a bit or take a short gallop if he felt especially frolicsome; but life as a hard struggle for sustenance, such as it was to the native island ponies, Sir Wilton did not know.

After he had become well acquainted with the sheep and the moors, the children drove him to the foothills, where the cows were pastured. The cows were gentle, mild-eyed creatures who gave a surprising lot of milk for their size.

The feed here was sweeter and more to the colt's liking. The cows treated him with respect and consideration, so he got along very well. Occasionally some of the wild colts strayed in among the cows and Dapple Dandy made their acquaintance.

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But the horses stayed in the hills most of the time. The feed in the cow pastures was rather scant, and one had to learn to distinguish the grass from heather, or harebells, or thistles, which Sir Wilton learned to do after several sorry mistakes.

One June morning, when he had been with the Pedersons about two months, he was feeding away peacefully in a sheltered spot, when he heard a sound of mad galloping close at hand. He looked up hurriedly and saw Black Fury bearing down upon him. For a few seconds he looked at his enemy in astonishment, but when the vicious black colt wheeled by his side and lashed out with both heels at him he knew what was up. The vicious kick missed him narrowly, so he wheeled about and faced his adversary, watchful and on guard. The black colt retreated for fifty feet and stood looking at him belligerently. Then he reared upon his hind legs and began pawing the air like a windmill and walking toward Dapple Dandy,

his lips drawn back, showing his white teeth.

This is a common antic among infuriated stallions of full size, but is rarely seen in a colt. The sight was enough for Dapple Dandy. He had never seen a horse walk on his hind legs before, and did not even dream that they could do it. This strange feat, together with the savage looks of Black Fury, filled him with terror, and he galloped frantically toward home. The black imp followed as far as the moors, but, as he was not so finely built as his rival, he was soon left behind.

The children saw their favorite come galloping madly toward the house, and ran out to see what was the matter. He was evidently much disturbed, for his flanks quivered and he trembled as though cold. At first they could not discover the cause of the fright, but they finally made out Black Fury peering down over a distant boulder at them, and they knew what was the matter. So they petted Sir Wilton

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and told him that he was a dear colt and that they hated Black Fury. But as Mr. Pederson had told them to drive the new colt back to the pasture whenever they saw him with the sheep, they were obliged to drive him back to his enemy.

After that he was always on the watch for the imp, and he usually fled at the first sight of him. Things went on until one day Black Fury cornered him between two steep banks and charged full speed.

Poor Sir Wilton could not run, so he wheeled and stood with his heels waiting for the tormentor, while he looked back over his shoulder so that he would know when to kick. The belligerent Blackie had not expected this move, so he galloped full upon Dapple Dandy, who lashed out at just the right time and caught him squarely on the chest.

This was the first punishment that he had received at the hands, or, rather, the heels of Sir Wilton. It made him less

sure of himself and more cautious, and it gave Sir Wilton confidence. It taught him that he, too, could fight. In fact a little of the Shetland-pony fighting spirit was born in him that day, so after that it was not so uneven a battle as it had been before.

He even went far into the hills with the rest of the wild Shetlands, most of whom were friendly enough. He was always on the watch for his enemy and they often had clashes, but these encounters were never so one-sided as they had been at first. Sometimes Sir Wilton tired of always being hounded and watched, and then he would turn and give his adversary a real battle. They would charge and retreat, kicking and biting at each other until one of them gave ground, and this was usually Dapple Dandy, for he was a thoroughbred. Breeding and luxury had taken something of the island fire out of him, so he was not really a match for his hardier kinsman, because he did not like to

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fight as well as the other colt did. It was easier just to gallop away.

It was a very common thing for one of the colts to be lame for several days or to have an ugly bite upon the flank or shoulder. But the island farmers do not pay much attention to these rugged little horses, so Sir Wilton for most of the time had to fight his own battles and make the best of his rather hard lot.

Thus the short summer passed and the early autumn came. Dapple Dandy managed to keep himself in fair flesh, although not so good a browser as the native ponies. But when storms came and he had to paw away the snow it was quite different. Then, with the rest of the pony herd, he often went down to the seashore to paw in the snow for seaweed and moss. He now found that his life was just a long struggle to keep down the gnawing at his vitals, and also to keep warm.

His coat had been bred to grow short and not so thick as that of his wild cousins,

so he minded the cold much more than they.

Mr. Pederson, seeing that he was not getting along very well, took pity on him and allowed him one meal a day of the black oats that he had so despised when he first came to the island. These objectionable oats he ate ravenously and was most grateful for them. He was also allowed the protection of the open shed. So he came home each night to sleep, and the children again saw much of him. Once more he received the petting and fondling that his horse heart yearned for.

Black Fury also came to the farm buildings to see what had become of his rival. When he again discovered him enjoying the petting of the children and the comforts of the open shed at night, for they always drove the black colt away, his wrath again mounted, but he could not vent it on Dapple Dandy now, for he was among friends. He went back to the hills

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and nursed his rage against the day when he should again come to grips with his hated rival.

So the winter passed and spring came again. Finally Sir Wilton was once more driven back to the pastures among the hills. Here he and Black Fury met often, and their encounters were more savage and of longer duration than they had ever been before, for both were older and heavier. About the middle of the summer Sir Wilton came limping to the farmhouse with a badly strained ligament, and was obliged to keep quiet for several weeks, but he finally went back to the hills and his tormentor. Thus the seasons came and went,—the short summers with their fleeting beauty, which seemed even more beautiful to the islanders because it was so transient, and the short spring and autumn and the cold, hard winters. Through it all Sir Wilton grew in stature and weight and also in beauty. It was finally admitted by all the breeders that he was the most beau-

tiful and best set-up young stallion that had ever fed upon the islands.

Three years passed quickly by and Sir Wilton came to his fourth year. He had now reached his full height of twelve hands, or forty-eight inches, and his full weight, which was a little less than four hundred pounds. His head was beautiful in line. His eyes were large and lustrous. His coat was sleek as satin, and it shone when he had been brushed, as he sometimes was for inspection, until you could almost see your face in it. His mane and tail were long and flowing. Altogether, he was a wonderful little horse, one that a horse fancier would go many miles to see.

A year before he had gotten his first colt, which was a living picture of him, and now little Dapples was trotting about like a dog at the heels of one of the island mares. Sir Wilton had never been jealous of this colt, as some stallions are, but had seemed to take a great pride in him, for they often sniffed noses. Black

Fury, on the other hand, probably recognized the hated aristocratic blood, and he tormented the colt just as he had done his sire. This led to several very sharp encounters between the stallions.

It was a bitter November twilight when Sir Wilton and Black Fury finally met in a gulch among the hills. The black devil had been following Sir Wilton for days, looking for just such a chance, but the latter did not know it. Even if he had, it is doubtful if he would have shunned him, for he had now come to his full stallion strength. Besides he owed the black tormentor a good beating for the way in which he had treated little Dapples.

Although it was only November, the landscape looked like midwinter. The snow was two feet deep on the ground and the wind was bitter cold. Sir Wilton should have gone down to the farmhouse where he usually spent the winter, but this day a fit of restlessness had seized him and he had wandered far into the hills. The

black shadow had been following him all day like a pursuing fate.

Sir Wilton had trotted up a narrow arroyo, or gulch, to its head, looking for some spot where the wind might have swept away the snow so that he could find some feed. This gulch was a perfect pocket. Its walls on three sides were so steep that no horse could climb them.

He had reached the head of the pocket when he heard a slight noise behind him. Looking about over his shoulder, he saw the black stallion trotting rapidly toward him. There was no mistaking his intent, for his lips were drawn up, showing his white, gleaming teeth, and he fairly bristled with fury. Dapple Dandy wheeled around quickly and faced him.

He knew instinctively that a death struggle had come. It had been leading up to this ever since the black colt first kicked him the morning that he came to the island. He was not afraid, but he

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knew full well that his adversary was a terrible fighter.

Black Fury trotted forward until he came within fifty feet of his rival, then stopped and stood glaring at him. He was working himself up to the proper fighting pitch, although it seemed to Sir Wilton that he needed no such priming. He snorted and snapped his teeth like a steel trap, then sprang forward. Three or four jumps carried him to within ten feet of Sir Wilton, when he wheeled and lashed out with his heels. But he was not quicker than the dappled stallion, who wheeled at the same instant and also kicked out with his heels. Their hoofs came together with a ringing sound, but did no damage. Then both wheeled again and stood facing each other thirty feet apart. For several seconds they stood thus, when Black Fury again executed that circus stunt that had so terrified the dappled colt. He reared on his hind legs and began slowly walking forward, paw-

ing the air and snapping his teeth. Old horsemen who have handled stallions all their lives say there is no more terrible sight than a horse, gone mad with rage, turned into a terrific fighting-machine.

But two could play at this game, so Sir Wilton reared and also advanced. When they were about twenty feet apart both suddenly came down on all fours, and the black stallion struck savagely at his adversary with his fore-feet, while Sir Wilton in turn sprang forward and tore a large piece of hide from the black imp's face. This seemed fairly to drive Black Fury out of his senses, and he threw all precaution to the wind and charged his adversary recklessly, striking, biting, and kicking in rapid succession.

Sir Wilton met this onslaught as well as he could. He lashed out with both heels several times, and twice landed stunning blows on the black horse's chest, but the latter was as tough as an oak and could take more punishment than his high-bred

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rival. Twice they reared at such close range that they came down almost together, tearing open gaping wounds in shoulders or neck. The snow was trampled like a battle-field and streaked with blood.

Back and forth they surged, first one getting the advantage and then the other, biting, kicking, squealing. Their breath came in whistling gasps through widely distended nostrils as the battle grew more and more furious.

Finally Sir Wilton landed his heels fairly in the side of the black fighter and scored two broken ribs against his adversary. But his advantage was of short duration, for the black fighter retreated, feigning fear, and threw him off his guard. Sir Wilton advanced carelessly and the black stallion played him the same trick, breaking three ribs instead of two. His blows also landed just above the dappled stallion's heart, and for a second he wavered as though he would fall. But he soon

regained his wind and confidence and the battle raged on.

It is doubtful how it would have ended. Perhaps they would have fought for hours, had not the black fighter had a bit of luck when the struggle had been going on steadily for about an hour. Sir Wilton had been pressing him hard and scoring several hard blows with his fore-feet, when the black stallion landed a kick that broke one of his rival's fore-legs just above the knee and spelled his doom. The game horse was quick to recognize his defeat, and he backed against the wall, determined to punish his adversary as much as possible before he was finally borne to earth. He could no longer strike with his fore-feet, and he did not dare stand with his head to the wall, so he stood there grimly biting and occasionally turning to lash out with his heels, but this effort cost him great pain and he soon ceased fighting and stood taking his punishment like a soldier.

Black Fury was not slow in administer-

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ing it, for he struck with his fore-feet and lashed out with his heels, landing kick after kick. Finally the beautiful dappled stallion was borne down to his knees and the victor reared above him and came down with both cutting hoofs on his beautiful head. This laid him low. His tormentor did not leave him even then, but he reared again and again, coming down with his pile-driving hoofs and grinding the thoroughbred into the snow. For half an hour he battered away, but finally, seeing that all life had left him, he trotted slowly away. He had not come off without many terrible wounds, and it would be weeks before he would again be himself. But he had conquered.

Henceforth the range and the mares would be his. He was content.

CHAPTER III

FAREWELL TO LITTLE DAPPLES

TWO or three days after the battle, as Sir Wilton did not put in an appearance at the farm buildings, where he was in the habit of coming often, Mr. Pederson went to look for him. He first discovered Black Fury limping about on three legs with a strained shoulder, and bearing many other scars. Mr. Pederson's suspicions were at once aroused. Finally he found poor Sir Wilton, the pride of his farm, lying where he had fallen. He was pounded into the snow as though with a pile-driver, and the snow for a hundred feet around showed how desperate the struggle had been.

At first, Mr. Pederson was so angry that he declared he would shoot Black Fury, but finally reflected that such a

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course would not bring back Sir Wilton. He had already lost one stallion, so why sacrifice another; besides, the black horse was the best native stallion on the island. So the crime went unpunished.

When the children heard the full story from their father they were heart-broken, for they remembered the little dappled colt as he had first appeared on the island. But their attention was soon claimed by another love.

About a week after the death of Sir Wilton, the black horse discovered little Dapples, Sir Wilton's son, who was then about six months old, running about in the hills with his mother. The sight of the small dappled colt, which was a living picture of his sire, so enraged the fury that he at once went after him to kill him. But the mare would not let him. She placed herself constantly between him and the object of his rage. A stallion will rarely attack a mare. He was greatly handicapped by the fact that he was now traveling on

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three legs. Little Dapples himself had no mind to be stamped to death by the snorting, wild-eyed animal, so he ran like a jack-rabbit, doubling and twisting, and always keeping his mother between himself and his tormentor. So it happened that they came almost up to the farm buildings, the black stallion biting and striking at the mare in his vain endeavors to get at the colt, and the faithful mare warding him off. Mr. Pederson saw them coming, and went after the fury with a pitchfork and drove him away. So it happened that for the second time a dappled colt was taken into the house and the hearts of the Pederson family.

But this colt was much smaller than the other one had been. Sir Wilton had come to the island farm as a yearling, while little Dapples was only six months old. He was given a place to sleep in the open shed, and he often trotted into the best rooms in the house, much like a large dog. The children fed him with care and brushed

and caressed him. He was even more of a favorite than his sire had been, because he was so much smaller. So all through that winter little Dapples lived in the Pederson household, almost as one of the family. He even followed the children to school one day, much like Mary's lamb. He finally became so much of a pet that if the children were going away from the farm they had to tie the little colt up first.

But the raising of colts or almost any live-stock for the market is attended by many sad farewells among the little folks. A calf, a lamb, or a colt will work its way into the hearts of the children and they can hardly live without it. Then one fateful day a stranger will drive into the yard. The children will at once be suspicious of him. Somehow he has a sinister look. Presently Father will come around, looking rather shamefaced, to tell them that he has just sold their latest pet. So it happened with little Dapples in the spring, when he was just a year old.

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A breeder from England had heard of the famous Sir Wilton who now lay up in the hills under the heather, and he wanted to buy him.

Mr. Pederson could not sell him, but he would sell his colt, an exact image of Sir Wilton at that age.

The dealer looked the small horse over carefully while the children stood about with tear-stained faces, hanging on his every word. Finally he spoke, and they knew at once that little Dapples' fate was sealed.

"I will give you twenty pounds for him," the dealer said. Mr. Pederson nodded his head, at the same time looking fearfully at the children.

So it happened that just three years after Sir Wilton had come to the island, his colt went back to the mainland. He was sent in the same crate that his sire had come in. The children gave him one last brushing and petting, and then fled tearfully into the house while their father

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drove away with him, the favorite of all their many farm pets.

After his short and uneventful life on the island farm it was a strange and eventful journey upon which little Dapples had set out. But this was only the first of many long trips that he was destined to take. First he was loaded on a small steamer bound for the mainland. After a few hours of rather rough sailing the ship touched at a harbor which was also a railroad terminal, and the crate containing Dapples was transferred to the railroad. After two or three rather stupid days of bumping about in freight cars the small horse finally arrived at his destination, a town in Kent, England.

So he had come at one jump from the bleak, desolate Shetlands to one of the most beautiful shires of England. It was a strange transition, but of course Dapples did not appreciate it fully until he had seen his new home.

After his crate had been shoved out on

a platform at the station a large hand was thrust in through the slats, and a friendly voice began talking to him. He loved the voice from the first, and knew at once that this man loved horses.

“ You poor leetle divil. Shutting you up in that prison like a jail-bird, and not givin’ you space to stretch your legs. And it’s Jerry McCoy that will see you are released as soon as he can git you home. That he will.”

While the pleasant voice had been speaking, the gentle hand had been stroking Dapples’s nose and caressing his forehead. So he knew that everything was all right.

After a short ride in a farm wagon they arrived at Rosemere, the country home of Sir Arthur Homesdale, Dapples’s new owner. Arrived at the stables, Jerry, the groom, called a helper, and together they lifted Dapples’s crate from the wagon, and, sooner than it takes to tell, Jerry had knocked off the side and led the small

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horse out. He was so stiff with his long confinement that he hobbled around like an old horse. But a vigorous rubbing by the groom and the helper soon set him right. Then he was led away and put in a spacious box stall, in quarters such as his sire, Sir Wilton Second, had occupied when he was a colt. Jerry came several times a day to see him and to care for him. He saw to it that he was properly fed and watered and groomed. He also took him for a little exercise each day.

Jerry himself would be mounted on a tall black horse, who would not even look at Dapples, while the groom led the colt by his side. Sometimes it seemed to Dapples that the large horse went too fast. At such times he would have to gallop to keep up, although the adult horse was merely trotting rapidly, but these daily gallops were the very best thing for the Shetland.

Finally, when he had been at Rosemere for about a month, Dapples was turned

out in a beautiful paddock each day and put back into the box stall at night.

The paddock was full of sweet grass, much better than anything Dapples had ever even dreamed of on the island. There were several large trees in the enclosure, so when the sun was hot there was pleasant shade.

Two old horses that had seen their best days kept Dapples company. They were rather disdainful of the Shetland, but kind to him, so his lot was ideal.

What better fun could a Shetland colt wish than to spend the wonderful summer days in a sweet-smelling paddock, where the feed was good and there was cool shade. The air was full of pleasant sounds, and if he felt too full of life he could gallop about in his small pasture to his heart's delight.

Then there were two children who came often to see Dapples. They were about the size of Hans and Olga, so he took to them at once. They were all eagerness to

have Jerry train Dapples for them so they might ride and drive him. But Jerry said he was too young and they would have to wait. So while the children waited for Dapples to grow, they and the little horse became the best of friends.

It was not until Dapples was nearly three that Jerry set to work to train him in all the ways of a saddle and phaeton pony. Up to that time the Shetland had not even dreamed that there was such a thing as work in the world.

Jerry first put a small open bridle on him, talking to him all the time in a friendly way.

“Now, leetle chap,” said the good-natured Irishman, “that thing I am puttin’ into your mouth is a bit, but you just think it is a lump of sugar. Here, here, don’t try to spit it out, and don’t shake your head. It won’t hurt you.” At this point the groom stroked the Shetland’s face and rubbed his nose and talked to him until he did not mind the hateful bit. Then Jerry

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led him about the yard, turning him this way and that until he had learned to mind the bit.

Next, he very carefully put the pad on the small horse, taking care to remove the breeching. Dapples did not mind that as much as he had the bit, not even when it was buckled tight around his middle. After he had become used to the pad, Jerry put on the breeching. Dapples kicked twice at this strange thing that flapped about his hind quarters, but Jerry assured him that it would not bite him, and he soon understood that it was a part of the game.

Jerry did not hitch him into a cart for several days, not until he had broken him to the saddle and allowed the children to ride about the yard while he led the pony for them. But finally Dapples was hitched into a fine new shiny phaeton, and his real life's work began. But Jerry did not trust the children with him until he had driven him several days under all sorts

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of trying conditions, and even then he always accompanied them on the black horse.

By degrees the careful groom educated the children in driving both in the saddle and in the cart. After about a month he felt sure that he could trust both children and pony. Then it was a very common sight to see the Homesdale children driving about the country in their shining phaeton drawn by their shiny dappled bay Shetland.

It is a question whether the children were prouder of the small horse or he of his charges. They praised and petted him and showed him to all the children for miles around, yet it is equally certain that he always held his head high and stepped off like a thoroughbred, never disappointing his trainer, old Jerry, with either his style or work.

Finally, in the autumn when the country fairs were being held Jerry conceived the idea of making a trick pony of Dapples

and showing him at the local fair. He had been working on him for several weeks before he finally got permission from Sir Arthur to exhibit him at the fair.

Most ponies are very clever and learn tricks much more readily than a full-sized horse. This is because they have been trick horses for centuries. Their diminutive size always gives them an advantage with an audience, for the children are always ready to clap for them even before they have made their bow. The Homesdale children were all excitement about Dapples's tricks, and they watched Jerry each day as he labored patiently with the small horse. When the fair day finally arrived, they could hardly wait until he should come into the arena and do his tricks.

When Dapples trotted demurely into the open space in front of the judges' stand, and made a low bow, a ripple of applause swept through the great audience in the grand stand.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” cried Jerry in a clear, ringing voice, “we have with us to-day the only pony in the British Isles that can tell time. It is now just three o’clock by my watch. I will show the timepiece to Sir Wilton III and see what time he makes it.”

He held the watch in front of the pony, which seemed to view it critically.

“Have you got it, old chap?” asked Jerry. Dapples bowed his assent. “All right,” said Jerry. “Tell the crowd what time it is.”

Dapples pawed slowly three times.

“Right,” cried his trainer. Then Jerry fell to examining his own clothes critically.

“Dapples,” he said at last, “I forgot to brush my clothes when I came away from home. Bring the brush and brush me.”

The pony obediently trotted to a nearby desk and brought a clothes-brush, holding the handle with his teeth. Then Dapples very painstakingly brushed Jerry, while the children laughed and clapped.

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“All right,” cried Jerry when he had finished. “I think it is time for school to begin. Put away the brush and ring the bell.”

The pony trotted to the desk and took up a small dinner-bell. This he held in his teeth, and, by shaking his head, rang it vigorously. “Perhaps all the children cannot hear from this distance. Go up the track and ring the bell,” said Jerry. Dapples obediently trotted away, ringing his bell, while the children shouted with glee. Finally Jerry whistled to him, and he came back, ringing the bell all the time.

“Now take your place at the desk and school will begin.”

The little horse obediently climbed upon a platform behind the desk, while Jerry put a very large pair of spectacles on him. This made him look as wise as an owl. “Now look over the books and prepare the day’s lessons.”

Very deliberately the Shetland opened book after book, taking hold of the covers

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with his lips and teeth. After seeming to look at the contents of each book for a few seconds, he pushed it aside and took another.

When several minutes had been consumed in this make-believe school, Jerry announced that he had just discovered that the pupils were all at home sick with the measles and the school would be dismissed for that day. So the small horse rang the bell to conclude the school day, and this trick was at an end.

Then Jerry asked different people in the audience to give him numbers of one figure each. He repeated them carefully to Dapples, who in turn noted each by pawing with his fore-foot. He also added and subtracted in the same way.

All the time that Jerry was giving the small horse these examples in arithmetic he stood with his back to the audience, so that only the judges in the stand in front of him saw the movement of his hand that the small horse watched carefully.

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Several other amusing tricks were performed, and Jerry finally asked Dapples to conclude his part of the performance with a short prayer.

To the great delight of all the little people, the Shetland got down on his knees and bowed his head. He stayed in that position until his master cried, "Amen." Then he got up with a spring which made every one laugh.

Such a round of applause as greeted the conclusion of these tricks was rarely heard at the fair.

When Jerry was leading Dapples back to the stable where he would stay until they were ready to go home, a well-known London animal dealer stepped up to him.

"What will you take for the little horse?" he asked.

"He isn't for sale, sir," returned Jerry quickly. "Sir Arthur does not need money as much as the children need Dapples."

"All right," returned the animal buyer.

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“ He is a clever little horse just the same. I think he could be developed for a circus trick pony. That was what I had in mind. If you ever do conclude to sell him, let me know.” He put his card in Jerry’s hand.

It was true that Sir Arthur did not need money at that time, and no one could foresee the financial disaster which overtook Rosemere’s owner the following spring. He became involved in a great South African mining failure, and not only Rosemere, but everything that Sir Arthur possessed, went under the sheriff’s hammer. So it happened that the animal buyer from London was notified. He came up, and Dapples was struck off to him for one hundred pounds.

So with many tears the English children said good-byes to the Shetland, just as the other two children had on the Island of Shetland three years before, and Dapples sailed away to America to join the circus. He went in the company of two elephants, a giraffe, two cages of monkeys, and a

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cage of tropical birds. Thus his circus life had already begun even before he landed in New York. He was at once forwarded to the circus, where he began his strange adventures as a trick pony.

Here he met the boy whom he came to love above all other people, the one who was finally to be his owner.

CHAPTER IV

THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN

THREE small boys called Freckles, Pickles, and Beany sat on the top of the high board fence that surrounded the railroad switch-yards, waiting for the first section of Bingham and Daily's Great American Circus, which was to show in town that day. Of course the three boys had other names, but these names were what the "fellers" called them, and that is what goes in Boytown.

The clock on the city hall had just struck four, and yet the boys had been there for half an hour. The top board of the fence cut into them badly, yet they did not mind. They could not have told whether they were sitting on a sharp cut-

ting board, or in an easy-chair, for they were thinking of nothing but the coming show. The first rosy streak of day was just appearing in the east. The robins had just begun their morning song. Even the milk wagons had not yet rattled into the city.

Yet there were others astir besides the enterprising three. Farther on down the yard other boyish figures might be seen balancing on the fence. A truck farmer who had come early to town had stopped with his load of wares just outside the yard. He expected a good business at high prices. But he was not likely to "put anything over" on the circus people. They are well prepared. They come to town expecting to meet all emergencies, so they would not be as easy as the farmer thought.

Freckles, the largest of the three boys, was an orphan. He lived up at the poor-farm, but, notwithstanding that, he was very popular with the boys.

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Pickles was conducting the party, for he had an uncle in the circus business, who had told him all about the great American show. So he was expected to explain everything to the other two.

Freckles had come down to the yards partly because of his great love for horses, a love that he had not been able to fully indulge. True, he had ridden the colt up in the pasture at the poor-farm, until he could ride like a monkey, but this had been on the sly. For Mr. Perkins, the keeper of the farm, was a rather stern man, and he did not approve of Freckles running the colt up and down the lot half the time, as he would have liked to do. Besides, the colt was just an ordinary horse. Freckles loved him more than any other animal in the whole world, but he was a rusty brown and his mane and tail were not heavy nor luxuriant. His boyish heart yearned for a real beautiful, prancing, dancing steed that would race with him until he dropped.

“Gee,” said Beany at length, “I wish it would hurry up. This board is gettin’ sharp.” But the words were barely out of his mouth when the locomotive whistle sounded and the yardmaster and switchmen hurried into the yard to help in the disposition of the section. Presently it came thundering and panting, hissing and roaring, into the yard.

A mighty locomotive drew the section, which was made up of about thirty gaudy, gilded cars. They were almost a show in themselves, even before they disgorged their wonderful freight. The locomotive stopped almost in front of the three boys, and they were all excitement.

“Now, fellers,” cried Pickles, “you just keep your eyes open and I will tell you all about it. See that chap with the blue coat and the cap, the one just climbing down from the first car? That is the mailman. He’s headed straight for the post-office. He goes three times a day and gets a bushel of mail each time. See that

big, swell-looking guy just behind him. He is the general manager. Things go about as he says or there is trouble. See that third feller. Looks like a baseball player or a wrestler. He is the show's detective, and he is headed for the police station. He tells the local cops what to look out for. The feller in the ticket-wagon has got a stiff job, too. Often after the night show there are thousands of dollars left in the wagon. That feller sleeps on two guns, and if any one tried to rob that wagon they would get plugged, you bet. He can shoot like an Injun, and he ain't afraid, either. My uncle says that the crooks haven't ever robbed a circus ticket-wagon yet."

"What are all these people coming out of these two first cars?" asked Beany. "They don't look much like circus people."

"You just wait until you see 'em in the ring. Tights and spangles and war paint make a lot of difference. Those coming

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from the first car are the general manager's helpers. Those from the other are tumblers and acrobats and all sorts of dare-devils. See 'em rubbing their joints and limping down the steps; guess some of 'em get pretty stiff. My uncle says it's hard work, and no mistake. Come, fellers, let's go down to the tail end of the section and see them unload the wagons. That's where all the fun will be now." So the three slid down from the fence and ran for the last car.

They were none too soon, for old Whitey, the unloading horse, was already in place. A heavy pulley had been rigged. One end of a large rope was fastened to a convenient telegraph pole, while old Whitey's whiffletree was fastened to the other. When all was in readiness, the short chain connecting with the pulley was fastened to wagon Number One, and quicker than you could say it, the wagon came rolling off the sloping platform at the rear of the car, and was landed

safe on the ground without so much as a scratch. Six heavy draft-horses were waiting for it. In no time they were hitched to the first wagon. The driver clambered to his seat, his whip cracked, and the first stake-and-chain wagon had started for the grounds.

“ We’ll see them drive those stakes and stretch the ropes when we get down to the lot,” explained Pickles.

Then there were more stake-and-chain wagons, canvas wagons, centre-pole and side-pole wagons, water-tank wagons, and wagons containing all the thousand and one things that were needed at once on the grounds. No matter how fast old Whitey pulled the wagons off the train with his pulley, the team of horses which belonged to the wagons was always in waiting. The whole moved along like a great machine. Everything was in place. Nothing was missing. Each man and animal knew just what he was to do, and did it in the shortest possible time. “ Gee,” said Freckles,

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when he had watched in silence for a while, "they work like soldiers."

"You bet they do," replied Pickles. "My uncle says that the circus won't stand for no nonsense. They are good to you as long as you keep at your work, but if you get to fooling or don't deliver the goods, it is good-night to your job."

In half an hour's time the section had been unloaded, and the wagons were rattling away toward the circus grounds. But this was none too soon. For, just as the last wagon disappeared, the second engine-whistle sounded and another gorgeous, gilded section rolled into sight. This was switched on to a track close to the first, and again Whitey began snaking the wagons from the long cars.

"More people in the first two cars," explained Pickles. "All sorts of performers and their togs and all their trunks in the cars behind. Gee, fellers! The elephants and the giraffes and the camels are on this section."

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Again the three youngsters took a commanding position and watched while the section disgorged its load of wonders. They were the most interested in the unloading of the animals. But Freckles's attention was soon claimed by some of the chariot and ring horses, that now stepped daintily from a car devoted especially to them. But he fairly went wild when they began unloading a car of special riding ponies, among which were several Shetlands.

One of these, a beautiful dapple bay, especially claimed his attention. This pony's coat shone like satin, and he held his head high and stepped like a thoroughbred.

"Fellers, fellers, look at him!" cried Freckles. "Ain't he a peach! I mean the dapple bay pony. Gee, wouldn't I like to ride him." Freckles was so excited about the dapple pony that he wanted to follow after him to the circus lot at once, but the others would not.

They wanted to wait and see the other sections unloaded.

“In the third section there will be all animals in cages. That section has got some of the best wagons. We mustn’t miss that,” explained Pickles. So Freckles assented, although he could think of nothing but the pony that had just trotted away to the circus lot. Finally the last section had been unloaded, and Pickles had pointed out the owner’s car, at the very end of the last section.

“He’s the High-Mucky-Muck. He allus travels in that last car, so he can see it is all moving along all right ahead of him. If there is a wreck, he is on the ground in no time. That’s him, the big fat feller. I saw his picture on a billboard the other day. Gee, I guess he is a rich guy. He could buy this whole town.”

“Come, fellers, let’s go to the lot,” put in Freckles.

“All right,” assented his companions.

So the three started on the run for the grounds.

To their great surprise, when they reached the lot, the dining-tent was already up, as well as the restaurant and the barber's tent, complete even to its painted pole.

"You see, the dining-tent goes up first; they call it a top," explained Pickles, drawing upon his superior knowledge. "These circus fellers can eat like Annie Conda, my uncle says."

His companions did not know what sort of young lady Annie Conda might be, but they did not dare display their ignorance by asking questions.

"See that guy with the steel tape, measuring and driving down small stakes. He is laying out one of the big tops. I guess it is the menagerie tent. Pretty soon the stake-and-chain wagon will come along. There it is."

Hundreds of feet of large rope and countless stakes were soon tumbled out on

the ground, and men with sledge-hammers began driving in large stakes where the small ones had been. Almost before they knew it, the perimeter of the menagerie tent had been laid out.

“Come, fellers, run. They are hauling up the big top. Hurry.”

The three made all speed toward the spot where the big top was going up. Two horses were raising the centre-pole and much of the canvas at a single stroke. When the centre-poles had been hauled into an upright position, they were made fast by guy-ropes, and the framework for the big top was in place. Meanwhile other men had been setting up the side-poles. These were twelve feet high and twelve feet apart. Still other men were lacing together the canvas for the side walls. That likewise went up like magic, and everything was ready with the exception of the seats. But while the wondering boys were speculating about these, a chair wagon rattled up and men began

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placing the seats in seemingly endless tiers.

Meanwhile, as the big top rapidly approached completion, other small tents were springing into place everywhere. Side-show wagons were taking their positions. Already the cries of venders had begun on the outskirts of the grounds. Soon the cracking of whips and the cries of the side-show men would be heard everywhere.

“It makes me dizzy,” said Beany. “I never saw things go up like this. Gee, wouldn’t it be fine to live with the circus and see all this every day?”

Freckles was thinking the same thing, but he said nothing.

The three boys hung about the circus grounds, munching peanuts and watching this wonderful life until the parade made up. If they had been amazed at the way in which this tented town had sprung up before their very eyes, they were equally astonished to see the circus wagons trans-

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formed and made ready for the street parade. Pompons and tassels were placed on the horses' heads, and in some cases gay blankets were thrown upon their backs. Then cowboys, Turks, Moors, Indians, and all sorts of picturesque people began pouring out of the dressing top and taking their places in the parade. Two huge elephants appeared from no one knew where, with their glittering howdahs in place and dark Hindoos driving them. They were followed by three camels, upon whose broad saddles sat dark Moors, men who, an hour before, had been sweating away with tent-pole and canvas. Then they were French or Italians, but now they were Moors. There was no mistake about that. When everything was nearly in readiness the boys started for the main street of the small city, that they might get a good place to view the parade. They were amazed to see the crowd that lined all the street along which it had been shouted from the housetops for weeks that

the circus would parade. They had some difficulty in finding just the place that they wanted, but they finally managed it.

When the glittering pageant at last appeared, they were perched like three monkeys on the top step of one of the churches of the town. They were sure of a fine view, for the parade would pass immediately in front of them. First rode one of the managers dressed like a herald. Then came the Queen of Sheba, mounted upon a wonderful milk-white horse. Her crown sparkled in the sunlight, and her regal robes fairly made the eyes ache. She carried herself with dignity, even if she had once been a waitress in a hotel. Close behind her the first of the three blaring circus bands poured out a flood of stirring music. Their instruments shone, and their uniforms glittered as only those of a circus band can.

Then came the two stately, swaying elephants, looking for all the world just as

though they had stepped right out of India. Close behind them came the camels, with their gay trappings and their tiny bells tinkling softly. Then followed such an array of strange people from all parts of the world that I despair of ever describing it. Probably the group that most strongly appealed to the three boys was that of the cowboys, Indian fighters, and Indians, all suggesting dare-devil stunts which would come later on in the ring.

Small children laughed and clapped, men and women asked questions of each other and called to the little people to see this or that. While above the babel of human voices the three bands blared and the calliopes shrieked, and the rattle of the heavy wagons went steadily on.

Midway in the parade the strangest rig that the boys ever had seen suddenly appeared. It was a dilapidated old express wagon, drawn by a rat-tailed white horse. The harness was mended with rope, and a bunch of straw clung to the pad. The

strange rube who sat in the wagon was dressed in blue denim overalls, and wore a jumper. His hat was a battered palm-leaf, and a wisp of his red hair stuck through the crown. He continually guided his ramshackle rig from one side of the street to the other, while the men in the parade shouted at him and threatened him with their whips.

“Look at the rube! Look at Uncle Jerry from Punkin Holler! Ain’t he a scream!” cried Freckles. “See him, fellers. Did you ever see such a rube before?”

“Ah, pshaw, Freckles, you are green. Don’t you know he’s a part of the parade? I saw them unload his old rig this morning, but I did not remember what my uncle told me then.

“They always carry a rube along to get all mixed up with the parade and make fun. He’s one of the clowns.”

“You mean to say that he belongs to the parade?” asked Beany incredulously.

“ I don’t believe it. Why, see how he is hindering things.”

“ But just see how the crowd enjoy him,” returned Pickles. “ Why, he’s the best laugh-maker in the parade. He’s a part of the parade all right.”

But at this point the dappled Shetland, which had so captivated Freckles’s heart in the morning, appeared. He was wearing a shining harness and drew a glittering basket phaeton. He was driven by a boy of about Freckles’s own age. The boy seemed to have perfect control over the small horse, for he danced, waltzed, and even reared on his hind legs at a touch of the whip and a pull on the line by the young driver.

Freckles fairly gasped at the sight of him. “ See him, see him, fellers. Look at him dance. See him rear. My, ain’t he a pippin? Ain’t he the dearest little horse?” Here words failed the orphan from the poor-farm, and he sat in speechless admiration until Dapples and his

driver had disappeared. When they were out of sight he sighed deeply and caught his two chums by their sleeves. "Fellers," he said, and his voice trembled and there were tears in his eyes, "I would ruther be that boy and drive that pony than to own the whole rest of the circus."

"Ah, pshaw," returned Pickles. "Why, the owner of this show is a millionaire."

"I would ruther be a cowboy than drive that pony, anyhow," put in Beany scornfully. "The Wild West for me every time. I like shooting and scalping."

From this point on the three sat in silence while the wonders of the great American show rattled by. When the last wagon finally disappeared, they climbed down from their church step and made an appointment to meet at the entrance to the menagerie top at two o'clock. All three had been fortunate enough to earn tickets by helping on the lot, and there was a red-letter afternoon ahead of

them that nearly spoiled their appetites for dinner.

They spent a wondering half-hour roaming through the menagerie tent and inspecting the animals and birds from all parts of the commonly known world, and some from parts very little known. They especially enjoyed feeding the elephants peanuts.

When the mammoth three-ringed show finally opened in the big top the boys were perched upon one of the high seats in readiness for all the circus had to give. Nor were they disappointed. It was as the bills had announced, larger and more stupendous than ever before. Tumblers and trapeze men and women kept them in breathless suspense. Men and women seemed to perform in the very top of the tent just as unconcernedly as though they had been only a few feet from the ground. The bands blared, and wild animals performed, while the clowns sweated and screamed to keep the crowd good-natured.

Wonder succeeded wonder, and miracle succeeded miracle.

Beany and Pickles went wild and shouted and gesticulated, but Freckles was quiet, watching and waiting for the coming of the little horse, who, he knew, was called Sir Wilton III. He had discovered this from a bill-board, and his driver was Tony Riata; the world's greatest boy equestrian, whatever that might be.

Finally Dapples appeared, and Freckles settled back in his seat in perfect bliss.

First he appeared as a saddle pony. He galloped, trotted, and ran. His rider clung to the saddle by one hand and one foot, then sprang from his back and raced by his side, only to spring lightly on at the right moment. They at once captivated the crowd. Finally they disappeared, and a few minutes later the little horse reappeared as Sir Wilton, the trick pony. Here Dapples again went through all the tricks that his old groom, Jerry McCoy,

had taught him in England. He told the time by the boy's watch. He multiplied, subtracted, and divided. He brushed his small master's clothes, just as he had Jerry's. He went carefully through his schoolmaster stunt, to the great amusement of the children, and finally he mounted a small platform to do his trapeze act. The trapeze was a swinging floor just large enough for the small horse to stand on, and about three feet above the platform. The boy went up to the trapeze and started it swinging. Dapples, with legs braced, stood watching it carefully. Finally, at just the right second, when it had approached very close to him, he sprang upon it, and, turning about, made a low bow to the audience. Then he faced about again and set the trapeze to rocking so that he could spring back on the platform. This he accomplished with ease. His small driver then sprang upon his back, and both disappeared amid thunderous applause.

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It seemed to Freckles at this point in the show that he could scarcely breathe. There was something about the little horse that made him want to cry. Not that he felt bad, he could not have just told how he felt, but the Shetland stirred him all up inside, as he told his chums.

When the afternoon show was over, the three went to the horse tent, at Freckles's suggestion, to see if they could get a closer view of Dapples. Here they found Tony, the driver, and one of the ringmasters in a lively wrangle. The man had the greatest boy equestrian by the collar and was pointing out to him three cruel-looking whip marks on Dapples's sleek side.

The boys drew closer to hear what it was all about.

"How did he get those whip marks? Tell me the truth if you know what the truth is," growled the ringmaster.

"Well, if you must know, I give 'em to him. He wouldn't mind," returned the boy sullenly.

“ Haven’t I told you again and again that you mustn’t whip him? He’s too high-strung. You’ll spoil him.”

“ As long as I drive him I will whip him whenever I think best,” returned Tony defiantly. He was Italian, and his blood was hot. But the ringmaster had a temper also.

“ You defy me, do you, you young cub. Well, I’ll teach you.” He lifted the boy by his collar from the ground and shook him as a cat would a mouse. The greatest boy equestrian kicked at him savagely and then began to cry.

“ You let me go, you fool. If you don’t, you will wish you had. If you don’t, I’ll—I’ll poison Sir Wilton. That’s what I’ll do.”

“ You will, will you? I am glad to know what evil you have in your dirty heart. You are fired. Go to the paymaster and get your wages this minute, and you leave the circus within the hour or I will have you arrested. I will

teach you to threaten this show. Now git."

The now thoroughly frightened boy did not need a further invitation, but very promptly "got."

Freckles went up to Dapples and tenderly stroked the whip marks on his sides. He was boiling with rage. He wanted to go after the boy and thrash him within an inch of his life, although he was much larger than Freckles. There were tears in his eyes, and several of them coursed down his freckled face. The ringmaster saw it and was amazed.

"I see you like horses, boy," he said kindly.

"I love them," blurted Freckles. "Why, I would kill the man or boy that would lick this little horse. I'd like to see that feller for a few minutes behind the poor-farm barn."

An idea came to the ringmaster. It came like an inspiration. He was used to taking a chance, and he was now in trou-

ble. One of the circus's best attractions was minus a performer. Dapples could not perform alone.

"So you live at the poor-farm, do you?" he inquired of Freckles.

"Yes, I have always lived there."

"Have you any parents or relatives?"

"No," returned Freckles, "not a one that I know of."

"If you like horses," the ringmaster said, "perhaps you can ride. Some boys ride naturally. They don't have to be taught."

"Ride, yes," cried Freckles. "I can ride anything that has four legs and a tail and is called a horse. I can do almost as well as this equestrian wonder on the poor-farm colt."

"How would you like to ride Sir Wilton?"

Freckles looked at the ringmaster in amazement for several seconds, then buried his face in the heavy mane of the Shetland and sobbed for joy.

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Finally he lifted his tear-stained, beaming countenance to the ringmaster.

“Mister,” he said, “if you wanted me to, and I had to, I could ride this little horse through fire and not git burned a bit.”

The circus man threw back his head and laughed long and loud.

“I like that kind of talk,” he said at last. “That is the true circus spirit. Bring the pony into the ring and I will see what you can do.”

It needed only a few minutes to convince the circus man that Freckles was a natural-born rider. He rode like a monkey. Nothing could break his hold in the saddle. He was, of course, not so polished a rider as the discharged Tony, but he would equal him in a very few days, with proper training.

Together they led Dapples back to the horse tent.

“How would you like to jump the poor-farm and go with the circus, and ride

the little horse every day?" asked the ringmaster at last.

"Oh! Oh! I'd like it better than anything else in the world. I would work every hour of the day to learn. I would be as good to him as though he was my brother. I never would strike him, and I would thrash any one who did."

Freckles's eyes shone like stars. His face was radiant and his voice trembled. The ringmaster divined at once that he was a real horse-lover and a boy that he could trust. He was the sort the circus was looking for.

"All right, boy," he said. "You're on."

CHAPTER V

FRECKLES AND DAPPLES

AFTER the ringmaster's statement that Freckles "was on" had been fully comprehended, the three chums went to a lumber pile at the edge of the circus lot to talk it over. Freckles himself was the most dazed and thunder-struck of the three. To his friends he had suddenly become a mighty hero. If he had been elevated to the Presidency of the United States, they would not have viewed him with more respect. They spoke to him in a new, awestruck tone, and kept looking at him askance, to discover, if possible, if he were really the same old Freckles.

"Gee, fellers," said Freckles after a short pause, which was more eloquent than

words, "I can't believe it. I guess I must be dreaming."

"No, you ain't," cried Beany. "We both heard him say it. He said you was on, and that you was to drive Sir Wilton as soon as you could learn his tricks."

"That's so," affirmed Pickles. "My uncle says that lots of strange things happen in the circus. Why, there was once a girl who wanted to belong to the circus. Her folks were rich and they didn't want her to, so they sent her to Europe. But even there she ran away and fell in love with a bareback rider, and became the most wonderful rider in the world. He told me lots of other strange things. He says that lots of Presidents of the United States would have made good bareback riders, because they can flop over so easy."

"Gee, I wonder what they will say at the poor-farm?" inquired Beany.

"Oh, they will be glad enough to get rid of me," returned Freckles. "I sha'n't say any farewells. The ringmaster said not

to. I'm not even going home. There isn't anything there I care about except Shep, and he don't belong to me, but he loves me better than he does Mr. Brown. Don't you fellers let on that you know where I have gone, not for a week anyway. Of course they might send for me, but I guess they'll be glad enough to git rid of me."

"Gee, but I wish I was you," put in Beany.

"Me, too," said Pickles.

"No, fellers," said Freckles. "You are both wrong. You are much better off than I am, even if I am going to join the circus, because you have got your homes and folks. Fellers, you can't imagine how much I want a home and some one to love. I miss it every day of my life. Fellers, I haven't ever had a mother to say good-night to." Freckles turned his head and wiped his cheek with his sleeve. His chums thought they knew how he felt, but they didn't.

“I guess you are right,” said Pickles; “but if you ain’t got a mother, you have got me and Beany to love you. We like you just as though you was our brother, don’t we, Beany?”

“You bet,” cried Beany. “Put it there, Freckles, old pal.”

Very solemnly the three shook hands and vowed eternal friendship. Few people realize how deep and sincere these boy friendships are, but the three could have enlightened them.

Finally, when Freckles’s future had been discussed from all its angles, Pickles and Beany went home to supper, while Freckles stayed, at the invitation of the ringmaster, to eat in the large dining-tent with the circus people. The three boys planned to meet again at the evening show, and were to say good-bye at Freckles’s car in the second section after the performance was over.

Freckles was all excitement when he followed the ringmaster into the dining-

tent that evening. About five hundred people were already seated, and laughter and jollity prevailed, although some of them looked tired, as they had a right to.

Freckles thought that pork and beans and brown bread had never tasted so good to him before in his life as they did this evening. The squash pie and doughnuts also seemed to have a flavor all their own, but the ice-cream and coffee, with which they ended the simple supper, made a perfect meal for the hungry boy. He talked very little, just answering the ringmaster's questions as briefly as possible.

While the ice-cream and coffee were being dispatched Mr. Bingham rapped on his table and made a few remarks. He complimented several of the performers on the day's work, and spoke of some things that he thought could be improved. When he had finished, Mr. Daily, the other partner in the show, arose and spoke of several infringements of the rules of the circus which he had noted of late. "You

know, the circus is a sort of army," he concluded. "We must have obedience and absolute working of all the parts. I trust I shall not have to speak of these things again."

After supper the ringmaster told Freckles that he might go where he wished until the evening show, so he went down to the horse tent to see Dapples. He found the little horse munching oats, but he looked up inquiringly when the boy approached him. At first he drew back and acted afraid when Freckles attempted to stroke his face, but he finally consented to be petted. When Freckles had petted and talked to him for perhaps fifteen minutes, he stepped behind the pony next to Dapples, that he might examine him. He was a beautiful black, but not so handsome as Sir Wilton. As Freckles stood there, smoothing out the pony's mane and wondering how much a horse like Dapples would cost, he saw a boy of about his own age enter the tent from the other end. It

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was not until he had advanced within three or four yards of where Dapples was munching his oats that Freckles recognized Tony Riata, the discharged boy-rider whose place he was to take. Instinctively Freckles stooped behind the black pony and watched Tony from his place of concealment. The boy looked carefully about to see that none of the grooms were in the tent, then he quickly slipped in beside Dapples.

“Eating your supper, are you, you stubborn little fool? Well, I will teach them to shake me and then fire me. I will show them. I’m a bad boy, and I guess they will find it out, too.”

With these words he took a small package from his pocket, and, again looking about to see that he was alone, he scattered its contents over Dapples’s oats.

Dapples crowded over against the black pony, to get as far as possible from his late cruel driver. Freckles stood on his tiptoes to see what it was that Tony had done

to Dapples's oats, for he remembered with a mighty rage and fear the boy's threat to poison Sir Wilton. As he peered over the neck of the black horse, his eyes and those of Tony met.

"Hello, you monkey-faced sneak," cried Tony. "Spying on me, are you? Well, if I could get a crack at that speckled phiz of yours, I would make it more ugly than it is now."

"What was you doing to the little horse's oats?" asked Freckles, for the moment ignoring the insult. Then Tony remembered, and he was both afraid and terribly angry that he had been discovered.

"I wasn't doing nuthin'. I just came to see that he was fed."

"You put something on his oats. I know you did. I saw you." With these words Freckles slipped under the necks of the two ponies and peered into Dapples's temporary manger. The oats were covered with a green powder. He quickly

dropped his cap over the oats and turned upon the defiant Tony.

“ You have tried to poison him, you sneak. A boy that would poison a little horse like him ought to be thrashed. He ought ter be killed.”

“ You ain’t the one to do it, anyhow. You are just a cheap sneak. You couldn’t ride a pig. I peeped through the tent and saw you try to ride Sir Wilton. You ought to have a pig to ride, monkey-face.” With the last words Tony reached up and slapped Freckles on the cheek soundly.

Quick as a flash Freckles returned a stinging blow on the dandy’s face.

This astonished Tony greatly, for he was something of a bully, and had not thought this green-looking country boy would fight.

A moment he hesitated. His better course was to flee, but he was boiling with anger because of his day’s bad fortune, and he wanted to vent it on some one.

This boy who had dispossessed him was the natural vent for his rage. So he came back with a blow on Freckles's chin that made him stagger. This was enough for Freckles. He had been boiling with rage over the three cruel whip marks on Dapples's side. In addition to that, he knew that the oats in the manger were poisoned. He glanced about to see that Dapples was not eating them, and his adversary landed one on his ear. Like a little fury he whirled and flew at the dark-faced boy, and the battle was on.

Freckles did not know that fighting was second nature to Tony, and that he had been in many battles and understood boxing, but, even if he had, it would have made no difference. Some one had got to be thrashed. He would at least punish the sneering Tony, even if he did get a good mauling himself.

Two of the ponies that had stood next to Dapples on the side opposite the black Shetland had been removed, and were now

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about to perform in the big tent. That left just enough room for the fight that was raging in desperate earnest.

Freckles set his teeth and fought as he had never fought before, but the stranger punished him badly from the start. He soon found that Tony was as light on his feet as a rabbit, and that he could dodge like a flash and give two blows for one. He landed three blows on Freckles's face and one in his stomach, which nearly doubled him up, before the boy had even scored a hit. Then Freckles luckily landed one on the end of his adversary's nose. This started the blood freely, but did little damage, yet it was encouraging. But the advantage was of short duration, for Tony soon closed one of Freckles's eyes with a stinging smash that made the poor boy see stars. Tony followed up this with another blow on the cheek while Freckles was still dazed. Then Freckles's mighty rage came to his assistance, giving him twice his ordinary strength and skill,

and he punched in two of his adversary's teeth.

“There, you black sneak. You will have that to remember me by for a spell, I guess.”

The idea that his beautiful face had been disfigured so enraged Tony that he clinched with Freckles, and the two went rolling about on the grass, almost under the heels of the horses. Finally they stopped rolling in a slight depression, and Tony was on top. “There, now I will teach you to spy on me and to take away my job, monkey-face.” He planted his knees upon poor Freckles's chest and began raining blow after blow on his face. The plight of Freckles would have soon been serious, but just then a strong hand seized the coat collar of Tony and lifted him bodily from his victim. Tony looked up, and the angry face of the ringmaster was glowering down upon him.

“I thought I told you to clear out, or I would have you arrested,” he thundered.

“ Well, it is not too late now. I will see that you don't get away this time. I presume you were up to some deviltry again.”

“ He came here to poison the little horse, and I caught him,” panted Freckles.

“ He's a liar,” cried the somewhat subdued Tony, who now saw that his plight was desperate. While he had been speaking he had been slyly unbuttoning his coat, the collar of which the ringmaster held firmly.

“ Poisoning Sir Wilton? If that is so, he'll sweat for it. I——”

“ Look out, mister. He is getting away from you,” shouted Freckles, but he spoke too late.

The crafty Tony, who was as slippery as an eel, slipped from his coat, leaving the empty garment in the hands of the astonished ringmaster, while he glided beneath the man's arm and fled down the aisle between the horses.

“ Stop him, catch him,” cried the ringmaster; but there was no one present to do his bidding.

“ Well, if he isn’t a slippery little devil! But I guess we have seen the last of him. He will get out of here lively, or I miss my guess.

“ He has no mind to sleep in the calaboose. He was poisoning Sir Wilton, did you say? ”

“ Yes,” replied Freckles. “ Look here in the manger.”

They stepped to the box wherein Dapples’s oats had been placed, and Freckles removed his cap from over the pony’s supper.

The ringmaster stooped and looked critically for a few seconds.

“ I guess you were just in time, boy,” he said at last. “ It is Paris green, and no mistake. You have saved Sir Wilton this time. Come out to the light and let me see if he hurt you much.”

“ Oh, I am all right,” said Freckles.

“If the little horse is all right, I don’t mind about myself.”

The ringmaster clapped Freckles on the back in a friendly way. “Oh, he’s all right, and you are all right, too. You will make a good pair. I am glad I have found you, boy. Come, the evening performance is on.”

In the big top that evening, perched upon the highest seat, the three chums again saw the stupendous show. It now had a new meaning for them.

Pickles and Beany were interested because their chum, Freckles, was soon to join his fortunes with the circus, and Freckles himself looked at the spectacle almost with fear. Pickles and Beany were very much excited and talked like magpies, but Freckles was rather quiet.

“What makes you so glum, old chum?” asked Pickles. “I should think you would be so excited you could not stay in your seat. I would, if I was going with the show.”

“Perhaps you would and perhaps you wouldn’t,” returned Freckles thoughtfully. He was apparently looking at the amazing stunts of the trapeze performers, but he was not seeing them. Instead, he was seeing the little bedroom at the poor-farm where he had always slept, as far back as he could remember.

“If there is anything troubling you, Freckles, you had better tell Pickles and me,” said Beany at length. “We are your friends, and we will do what we can.”

“No, it ain’t anything special,” replied Freckles, “but it is this way. I don’t suppose I can make you fellers understand anyhow. You see, you have got homes and I haven’t. So when you haven’t got any home, almost any place where you stay for a spell gets to be home. It don’t matter if people are mean to you, and you say you would like to run away and never see them again. You see, fellers, I haven’t ever had a mother. But I can’t help thinking how, when I was a little chap,

Mrs. Perkins used to brush my hair and dress me up to go to church. She was always scolding and nagging me, but she was a sorter mother. She'd fly around and act real scart if I had the croup."

"Oh, any one would do that," put in Pickles. "I guess they didn't waste no love on you at the poor-farm."

"No," returned Freckles sorrowfully. "They didn't waste none, but I guess they gave me a little. I guess they will miss me when I am gone. A poor-farm ain't much of a home, but if it is all you have got, then it is your home."

"If it was me, I would be glad enough to clear out," said Beany emphatically.

Poor Freckles looked at him in a helpless way and sighed. "Well," he said, "I suppose it sounds queer to you fellers, but the poor-farm is my only home, so it is a sort of home, and I shall miss it. It makes you feel queer to be pulled up by the roots. I know my roots ain't so long as you fellers that has homes and mothers

and brothers and sisters, but they are all the roots I've got and I—I——" Here poor Freckles became incoherent, and his chums respected his feelings and looked hard at the show. When the last astounding feat had been performed and the band had sounded its last ear-splitting blare, the great crowd poured out of the big tent.

"Look, fellers," cried Beany, all excitement. "See what they have done while we were in the big tent. Why, the tents are all gone."

Freckles and Pickles looked, and saw that it was as Beany said. The great menagerie tent, through which they had entered, had disappeared, together with the animals. All the smaller tents had been taken down, too, so the circus lot now looked almost deserted.

The three chums made all haste to the freight yard, where the ringmaster had told Freckles to report to section two and the second sleeper from the engine.

“ You must write us every day,” said Beany as the three trotted along.

“ Oh, yes, I will write often, but I guess I can't every day. The ringmaster says that I will have to work hard for a spell. He wants me to be able to go into the show and drive Sir Wilton in a week, just as Tony did. Gee, it scares me when I think of it, but he says I will get used to the crowd.”

“ Aw, yes, of course you will,” said Pickles contemptuously. “ Such crowds as this one to-day won't be anything to you in a few weeks. Just wait until you get to playing in Madison Square. That is where my uncle says you see the crowd.”

“ Freckles,” cried Beany, “ if there is ever any opening for a feller in the Wild West shooting department, you write me quick. Tell them I will accept at once.”

“ Aw, no, you wouldn't,” said Pickles scornfully. “ His folks wouldn't let him. But if they should ever want a manager's helper, perhaps I might get off.”

“You fellers are all right just as you are,” returned Freckles. “You don’t want to join any circus. I wouldn’t go if I had a home, not on your life. Well, fellers, I guess it is good-bye. Here is the ringmaster.”

Very solemnly the three shook hands, vowing eternal and everlasting friendship.

“I just know you will own the whole show some day, Freckles,” said Beany in a whisper. He didn’t want the ringmaster to hear such a prophecy. Freckles smiled feebly.

“Good-bye, fellers,” he choked. “I—I—we—— Don’t tell any one where I have gone for a week. Then perhaps I will write Mr. Perkins. I won’t ever forget you fellers. You have always been good to me. I—I—— So long, fellers. The ringmaster says I must come now.”

Pickles and Beany turned reluctantly while Freckles climbed aboard the sleeper.

“All right, boy,” said the circus man

cheerily. "I am glad you are here. I know you will like the circus, and you will have great times driving Sir Wilton."

"I am sure I will, sir," returned Freckles simply.

At one end of the sleeper there was a small restaurant. Here ice-cream and coffee were served to the weary circus people, ice-cream being their favorite dish before retiring. The ringmaster secured dishes for himself and Freckles, and they sat down and ate with the jolly crowd. All were joking and laughing and telling amusing stories of the day's doings.

"Boys," said the ringmaster in a lull in the conversation, "I have got a pretty good story to tell you to-night. This boy is the new driver for Sir Wilton. His name is Harry Wilson, but I know you will all call him Freckles. Isn't that what the boys call you?"

"Yes," said Freckles blushing.

"Tony had another fit of temper to-day and whipped Sir Wilton unreasonably.

When I spoke to him about it, he defied me, and I fired him. He came back at me by trying to poison the little horse, but this boy prevented it. They were having the liveliest fight I ever saw when I arrived on the scene." Then the ringmaster told of the fight in detail.

"Good for you, boy," cried an old bare-back rider when the story was finished. He leaned over and slapped Freckles on the back.

"That is the sort of stuff," said another. "You can't ride a horse unless you love him, and Tony never loved anything but himself."

Several of the performers shook Freckles's hand and said a cheery word to him before retiring, and he was quite overcome by their kindness.

Probably each was thinking of the day when he too had slipped away to join the circus. They did not know just what he had left behind, but anyhow he must be lonesome.

When they had finished the ice-cream, the ringmaster led the way to the berth recently used by Tony. In a very few minutes Freckles was undressed and ready for what the night might bring.

The engineer leaned out of the cab and watched until he saw a brakeman's lantern wave three times, then the train began slowly backing onto the main track.

Freckles counted the cars as they bumped over the switch. There were thirty-two in all. The long train stood for a few minutes on the main track, then the locomotive began the long pull to the next town where the Great American Circus was to show. Freckles's car was so close to the engine that he could hear it plainly as he lay in his berth. First it began slowly, and it seemed to his excited imagination to be saying, "Now we are off, now we are off, now we are off." Then it resolved itself into, "See us go, see us go, see us go," over and over, faster and faster. Finally the sounds merged in one

long continuous roar and the trip had actually begun.

The next thing Freckles remembered they were bumping slowly over another switch. He looked out of the window in surprise. It was daylight and they were gliding slowly upon the switch in the new town where they were to show that day. Close to the switch-yard there was another high board fence, and on the top board was a row of boys, watching, for all the world, just as the three chums had watched the day before in Freckles's home town. So it would be wherever they went. Dull and unenterprising the town where a few wide-awake boys did not get up in the early hours to greet the circus trains as they pulled into town.

Freckles dressed with alacrity, for his first day of circus work had really begun. He had been detailed to take Sir Wilton down to the grounds, and he was the proudest boy in America. From this time on, he was to see that the small horse

reached the grounds each day and was put back in his car each night after his part in the evening's performance.

For a few days while Freckles was learning to drive and ride him, Sir Wilton's part in the performance was to be dispensed with. This day Freckles did not have the leisure to watch the tented town go up, as he had the morning before, for the ringmaster, whose name was Mr. Williams, found plenty for him to do. He was kept very busy until after the parade, and then they went to dinner in the great dining top.

The ringmaster gave Freckles a ticket to the afternoon performance, and told him to watch everything carefully and learn as much as he could.

Freckles was very much astonished, early in the show, to have one of the managers announce that, due to the illness of his recent driver, Sir Wilton's part in the performance would be dropped for that day. But he added, "I am glad to an-

nounce that we have secured the services of a celebrated Kentucky boy driver, Leslie Atherton, who will appear with Sir Wilton as soon as they get acquainted."

Poor Freckles heard this announcement with a sinking heart. He could hardly keep back the tears. They had not even given him a chance to show what he could do. Probably the ringmaster would tell him after the performance that he might go back to the poor-farm. So he would not drive the dappled Shetland after all. How disappointed Pickles and Beany would be, and Mr. Perkins would give him a sound thrashing. It had been a great mistake after all, his running away with the circus. After the performance he sought the ringmaster with tears in his eyes.

"Mr. Williams," he said, "I don't think it is right for you to give my job to that Leslie Atherton until I had shown what I could do. I was going to work so hard, I know I could have made good."

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The ringmaster looked at him in astonishment for a second, then burst into a peal of hearty laughter and slapped Freckles soundly on the back.

“It’s all right, son,” he said; “don’t worry. I guess you and that Atherton boy will get along all right. You didn’t expect we was going to say Master Harry Wilson from Pumpkin Holler, did you? Why, that Atherton chap from Kentucky is yourself. Didn’t know yourself, did you? Well, you won’t know yourself in the glass, either, when you take a look at your driving togs. You are green about the circus. You have a lot to learn. We have to be all glitter and glisten here. It’s what takes with the crowd. But come on. Get out Sir Wilton, and I will give you some pointers about how to drive him. Perhaps you can go in the parade to-morrow.”

For an hour the boy and small horse worked patiently under Mr. Williams’s instruction. This was the first of many

hours each day that the man spent with the boy, perfecting him in the handling of the Shetland. But he made remarkable progress from the first. This was because he was a natural horseman, and also because he loved Dapples and the little horse knew it at once. So they worked together like two pals, as indeed they were. But Freckles's best fun was taking care of Dapples and combing and brushing him. He talked to him just as he would have to another boy. He told Dapples all his troubles when he had any, and they were wonderful chums.

Finally the day of Sir Wilton's first performance under his new driver arrived. Freckles was so nervous that he could not eat his dinner. When he finally drove into the ring and saw the mighty sea of faces all staring down at him, his arms went limp and he wondered if he could give the pony the signals for his stunts. But the small horse was the better performer of the two, for he began without

the signals, and that gave the frightened boy time to draw himself together and get back his nerve. So they worked together nicely. The performance was not quite so elaborate as that of Tony, but Freckles would do all of his tricks in time. Mr. Williams was much pleased with this first performance and complimented Freckles freely.

“Yes, you are all right, boy. I knew you would be. The secret of it is,—love your work.”

One evening when Freckles had been with the circus about two weeks, he was treated to a scene that disclosed to his boyish mind most graphically the fact that the life to which he had linked himself was no child's play.

It was a scene that made his hair stand up with fright and his blood run cold in his veins while it lasted,—just another of those strange tragedies which always follow in the wake of the circus. This is inevitable, since the show deals with the

transportation and control of savage and mighty wild animals, which have been taken from their native jungles and made to play a strange part in civilized life.

One of the marvels of this show which had most thrilled the three chums the first day that Freckles saw it, was the performance of El Capitan, a huge elephant, and his trainer, Señorita Angela Rincon, a dark, beautiful girl.

She seemed to have the huge beast under perfect control, and some of his stunts fairly took one's breath away. She would lie upon the ground, and he would slowly pass his great feet over her body, and, as a last feat of carefulness, he would lie down in such a position that the girl was completely under his body, which was partly supported by his legs.

"Gee," said Pickles to Freckles on that never-to-be-forgotten day, "if he should forget and lie clear down, I guess there wouldn't be much girl left."

On the particular night in question they

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were taking the elephants and all the other animals back to the freight yard to load them on the cars. These animals always go into the ring first, so that they may be loaded while the rest of the show is in progress. Freckles was trudging along with Dapples, and two of the largest of the elephant herd were directly in front of him. El Capitan had been rather cross for several days. Some of the circus people were afraid of him, but not so the fearless Spanish girl, who had gone through the usual tricks with him that evening.

Immediately in front of El Capitan in the little cavalcade which was wending its way back to the freight yards, was another huge elephant called the Emperor. The Emperor was older than El Capitan and better-natured. But there had always been strife between the two huge beasts. The manager had noticed it, and was planning to sell one of them. He did not want to part with El Capitan because of his

wonderful tricks, and the Emperor was a great favorite with the children. For the past week El Capitan had been constantly picking on the Emperor, and that huge beast's patience had been sorely tried. So it happened as they plodded along that evening that some of the camels in the procession ahead had paused to let several teams from an intersecting street pass. This slowed up the elephants, and El Capitan trod upon the Emperor's heels, and then prodded him savagely with his tusks because he did not move on. This was the last straw that broke, not the camel's, but the elephant's back. The Emperor wheeled with a movement surprisingly quick for so large an animal, and brought down his mighty trunk square upon the top of El Capitan's head. It was a blow that would have crushed the skull of almost any other animal. It would have broken the back of a horse and stretched him dead on the ground, but it only stunned El Capitan for a second.

When he fully realized who his assailant was, and what had happened to him, he went fairly insane with rage.

With a shriek of fury that fairly made Freckles's hair stand up, and a bellow of rage that stampeded the camels, El Capitan charged his rival, sinking his mighty tusks deep into the Emperor's shoulder and causing him to give ground.

Sir Wilton wheeled with a frightened snort and broke away from Freckles, galloping madly back to the circus lot. The attendants upon the two elephants darted at them with their iron-pointed prods, but the animals paid no more attention than they would to flies.

For a few seconds Freckles stood rooted to the ground. He was so astonished and paralyzed with fear that he could not move. Then, as one of the fighting monsters gave ground, and the struggle moved a few feet nearer to him, Freckles, with the agility of a monkey, shinned up a small tree that stood conveniently near the road.

Here he was just out of the reach of the elephants and in full view of the fight,—a sort of reserved seat, as he afterwards told Mr. Williams.

As they fought, dealing blows with their great trunks that would have broken any but the thickest skulls, and thrusting with their mighty tusks with the force of battering-rams, they shrieked with pain and rage and roared with anger. Such blood-curdling sounds poor Freckles had never heard. Presently the Emperor gave ground and they crashed into a high board fence at the side of the road. It was leveled to the ground as though it had been made of straw. Round and round they went in the open lot, thrusting, striking, and bellowing with rage and pain. Then the fight swayed back into the road and another section of the fence went down. At this point one of the manager's helpers galloped up on a panting horse. Seeing the desperate character of the fight, he galloped away to the freight yards for the

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elephant rifle which the management always carried. The poor Emperor, who was really not to blame for the fight, seemed to be getting the worst of it. He was not so strong nor so young as his assailant. His shoulders fairly ran blood from several gaping wounds inflicted by the sharp tusks of El Capitan.

Back and forth the fight swayed, but the Emperor was always the one to give ground. Finally, in an unlucky moment, El Capitan pinned him fairly against a tree by the roadside and then drove his tusks deep in his side, just back of the heart. With a mighty sigh of pain the great beast sank to his knees, just as the man with the elephant rifle galloped up.

One shot from the heavy gun, aimed at the heart, also brought El Capitan to his knees beside his vanquished foe, while another in the head laid him upon his side, within twenty feet of the tree where Freckles was still clinging.

It took only a few moments' scrutiny of

the Emperor to discover that he also was done for. So the third shot rang out, and the two huge beasts lay dead by the roadside, both having paid the price of their lives for the bad temper of El Capitan.

Freckles climbed down from his tree and went back to the circus grounds to look for Sir Wilton. To his surprise, when he appeared at the freight yards he found the sections were being loaded just as though nothing had happened.

The trains all pulled out on time, but there was one box car that was partly empty. The circus people were a little quieter than usual after the tragedy had been fully discussed, but the Great American Show went on.

Freckles learned the following day that the manager had telegraphed for two more elephants that very night, even before they left the freight yards. But the fight cost the company fifteen thousand dollars and one of the best trick elephants ever seen in the ring.

CHAPTER VI

OVER THE RINGING RAILS

FRECKLES soon discovered in his new life that, although they did the same things each day, yet no two days were alike. Each morning in the early dawn, if they were lucky, they rolled into a new town. They unloaded the three sections in the same manner, yet the task always varied. Sometimes the circus lot was near by, but often it was quite distant from the railway. Sometimes it was pleasant, and sometimes it was rainy. Freckles soon learned that a long rainy spell is the circus man's worst bugbear, and that the rain gets on the nerves of the performers as almost no other calamity.

Each day they pitched the tented circus town upon the lot and made ready for the

day's business. But no two towns were alike. Some were clean and some were dirty. In some places the people were pleasant, and in others, disagreeable. Some towns did all they could to help the circus people, while others tried to hinder them. There was also a great difference in the crowds that came twice each day to the big top to see the show. Some were easy to please and others hard. Some criticised, while others applauded each act regardless of whether it was good or bad.

But all this made very little difference with the performers. They went right on with their work, whether it rained or shone, whether the people applauded or hissed. Of course they were glad when they gave satisfaction, but all towns were alike to them, that is, they took no personal interest in any place; they could not, living in railway cars and white canvas tents.

Among themselves, however, they were like one great family. They always stood

together. Probably one of the most important people in the circus, from a human standpoint, was the circus mother. She was a large, matronly woman of about sixty. Her hair was gray and there were a few wrinkles on her brow, but her heart was only about sixteen, and her smile never failed, no matter what the trouble.

Every one called her mother, and she was mother to the whole circus; but really she was a matron, watching especially over the women and girls.

But this did not hinder the men and boys from bringing their troubles to her. It was from her that Freckles received the first real woman's love in his whole life, and he was accordingly grateful.

Not only did the circus mother see that all garments, and especially costumes and trappings, were mended and clean, but she always looked out for the spiritual welfare of her great family. Each season she took charge of the money affairs of some of the young men who were naturally

spendthrifts. Each week they gave her a portion of their pay. She guarded it carefully for them until the end of the season, and then gave it back to them with a bit of good advice about spending it.

Perhaps Freckles's best friend in the whole show was Big Bill, the head canvas-man. He was a tall, broad-shouldered chap, with a deep voice. He managed men as a general manages soldiers.

It was said on good authority that no canvas-man in the American show world could get so much out of a crew as could Big Bill. Yet he never bullied. He gave orders, and no one ever dreamed of disobeying them. When he gave an order and it proved too hard for his subordinate, the big fellow would himself take hold of the difficult task, throwing things right and left with his great strength, laughing at the crew's weakness all the time.

"You see, son," he would conclude, "your Uncle Bill don't ever ask anything of you boys that he can't do himself.

Everything is easy if you only take hold of it with a will."

Freckles's first acquaintance with Big Bill was made one dark, rainy night when the circus was badly mired after the evening performance. Freckles himself had taken Dapples to his car and seen him safely aboard. He had then gone back to the lot to see the circus people get through the mud. Mr. Williams had remarked, in his way, that there would be the devil to pay when they started to move.

It had rained all day long. Even in the morning, when they had come to the lots, several of the wagons had been mired. That afternoon during the performance there had come a mighty downpour, which was like a cloudburst. Some of the trapeze work had been given up because the paraphernalia were so wet and slippery. In many places on the grounds the water stood six inches deep. One of the rings inside the big top was so badly flooded that it had to be abandoned, while

the others were six inches deep with sawdust. It was such a day as sends a chill down the spinal column of the circus people.

Although the night performance was only about half through, yet outside was a scene of wild excitement. The menagerie tent was down and packed, as well as the dining top and several other small tops. Yet there was not so much noise as would have been expected, for the men were rather silent. Three wagons seemed hopelessly mired on their way off the lot.

Four mighty elephants stood ready as soon as the horses had given up. They had their strong harnesses on, and were only awaiting the signal.

Freckles saw a twelve-horse team straining and hauling frantically on the heavy wagon. Presently the horses were taken off and two powerful elephants took their places. At a word from their drivers they leaned forward and began straining on the load. To Freckles's great surprise the

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mired wagon began slowly crawling out of the mud. Like ponderous machines, the great beasts moved forward, carrying the wagon to safety.

Once it was fairly off the lot, the horses were again hitched to it and the load went on its way in safety. But the faithful elephants went back for another mired wagon.

Everything seemed to go badly that night. The canvas was hard to handle. It would not roll up readily, and it was also very heavy.

One of the smaller tents had collapsed that afternoon, deluging the inmates with hogsheads of water that had collected on its top. This had precipitated a merry row, and several people had promised to sue the circus, to which the manager had smilingly assured them that he would pay for their soiled linen, but that he thought they really needed a good bath.

But amid all this confusion and seemingly hopeless plight towered the tall

figure of Big Bill, the head canvas-man. He stood like the giant he was, warding calamity away from the circus. The locomotives at the freight yard were shrieking for them to hurry. Horses were balking and harnesses breaking. Other men were sweating, and some of them even swearing softly to themselves, but Big Bill kept on smiling.

He was always at the point where things were going the worst. Everywhere he went he carried good cheer and brought order out of chaos.

At one point, when three wagons had become mired at once and everybody despaired of ever getting the outfit to the depot, Freckles saw Big Bill call one of the circus clowns who was also watching.

“Here, you merry loafer,” cried the big fellow, “come lend a hand. You are not strong with your hands, but you are with your wits. A little fun, a bit of jollity, can do a pile to help these poor sweating devils out of this. Will you help?”

“ Sure, Uncle Bill. What’s my cue? ”

“ Well, you just go from place to place. Go where things are the worst. Crack a joke, a joke on the weather if you have one. Let it be a good one. Give ’em your best. Perhaps they will swear at you, but never mind. Keep at it until you get ’em to laugh. Once get ’em to laughing and we can beat this nasty storm.”

Freckles was amazed at this advice. What could a joke do to help the plight of the circus? But he followed after the clown to see if Uncle Bill had advised well.

The man of mirth waddled up to the first wagon.

“ Great night for ducks, buddies,” he said.

“ It’s a better night for geese like you; get out of this,” growled a husky driver.

“ ’Twas a goose that saved Rome,” replied the clown. “ And you can learn from a goose. Keep your feathers dry and don’t go in swimming when it is rain-

ing. But this isn't any rain. Why, I once knew a rain so bad that the fish all ran up under a bridge to keep dry."

"Get out with your fish story," grinned the driver. "Don't you know any more than to be cracking your chestnuts here in the rain? But that is a good one—fish keeping dry in a brook under a bridge. Ha, ha, ha!"

Thus the clown went from wagon to wagon, from one bedraggled crew to another, taking sunshine with him, and sunshine was what they all needed.

Almost before they knew it, the men themselves were cracking jokes about the rain, and laughter had taken the place of imprecations. It was also surprising how much faster the wagons moved under the stimulus of laughter than they did when they were cursed. Everything took on a different aspect, and Freckles saw they would get clear after all.

"Going pretty good, sonny," said Big Bill, clapping Freckles on the back.

“Queer what a little fun will do in a tight pinch.”

“Fun,” said Freckles; “I guess that didn’t have much to do with it. I guess it was all you. You are the brain of the circus when trouble comes.”

“That’s where you are wrong for once. I was almost stuck. I had done all that I could with my brute force. I had to have help of another sort. What the boys needed was cheering up. They had lost heart.

“Take it from me, Freckles, there isn’t any problem in the world that can withstand a good-natured grin. It just stares old dark-faced trouble out of countenance. It will put the devil on the run every time. Remember that, boy. If you are in a hard place, in the circus or out, just meet your trouble with a grin. Grin inside and outside and you will beat it, because if you grin that means you will keep up your courage, and courage spells success with a capital S.

“Well, there goes the last wagon. Let's beat it for the freight yard.”

Freckles never forgot the lesson; not even when he was grown up, and as tall, if not so broad-shouldered, as Big Bill himself.

Sunday with the circus people is really a day of rest and recreation.

The circus does not usually move more than seventy-five or a hundred miles between stands. But if they find themselves obliged to make a run of two hundred miles before a good city is reached, this run is planned for Saturday night and Sunday. So country people will often see the long, gaudy circus trains rumbling over the rails on a Sunday morning while the circus people make the best of this extra run. They come out on the platforms of the cars, or lie in the shade of the large wagons, reading, eating their lunches, or just visiting.

But if the run is only the usual length, the dining top and just a few tents, enough

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to provide for the comfort of both beast and man, will be set up. The big top and all the side-show tents will remain on the trains until Monday morning. So it happened that Freckles had many a delightful Sunday after the long week's work, for Mr. Williams kindly allowed him to ride Dapples about the country on these days. It was a good advertisement for the circus, and it kept both boy and horse in fine condition.

After the week's strenuous work, the circus people were glad enough to have Sunday come around. Some of them even put on their best clothes and went to the nearest church.

It was a restless, feverish life that they lived, and at first Freckles found it rather tiring, although he liked it immensely. But he soon got used to the excitement and to sleeping on moving trains, so that in two months it was second nature to him. It even would have seemed strange

to climb into a bed that stayed still while he slept.

Mr. Williams was anxious to have the boy attempt to learn bareback riding, but he did not seem to care for it. After a few futile attempts it was decided that he had better stick to the exhibition driving and the trick-pony stunts. But he did teach Sir Wilton several new tricks.

At the manager's suggestion some fine photos of Freckles and Dapples were taken, and after each performance the boy would ride about on the small horse, selling these pictures. In this way they made many friends for the circus. They even had invitations to dine out, but the management always preferred that they should eat at home. Performing was not a succession of frolics, and all had to stick closely to the work in hand.

Among the athletes who interested Freckles was a young man called on the circus posters "Flying Fred." He was a spring-board jumper and somersault man.

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He was a jolly, good-natured chap, always smiling. His greatest stunt was to jump over ten elephants standing side by side, and, as he jumped, he turned a double somersault. Like Freckles, he was an orphan.

He often confided to Freckles that it was his life's ambition to make the triple turn, but Freckles did not really appreciate the daring of the neck-breaking stunt. The management had always refused to let Flying Fred try it. They knew of too many good athletes that had died in the attempt. But Flying Fred bided his time and took no one into his confidence.

One morning, just after Freckles had been in the ring, putting Sir Wilton through some new tricks, to his surprise the ten huge elephants came marching in. This was unusual, so he stopped with Dapples beside the farther ring to see what was up.

The spring-board was in place, and Fly-

ing Fred was limbering up with some preliminary jumps. He had told the manager that he wished to try a new arrangement of the elephants. He thought it would be possible to place them farther apart, and so make his jump longer and more spectacular. At last the management had reluctantly consented to the experiment.

But Flying Fred had kept his real purpose safely hidden in his own mind. Freckles finally led Dapples over close to the other ring, that he might get a better view of the jump.

It looked to him like a terrible leap, but these marvelous athletes did such unbelievable things that he did not doubt Flying Fred would clear the elephants all right. At last all was ready. The signal was given and the spring-board was released.

With a bang the board flew up, and the athlete shot high in air. When he was at the highest point, he reached forward with his hands and locked them around his legs

below his knees. Then they saw the muscles on his arms and back stand out as he strained to start himself to turning. Over he went with even more than the usual velocity. Again he turned, and then the circus people who were watching caught their breath, for he had started for the third turn, but was not quick enough.

Either the jump was not long enough, or his straining muscles were not working hard enough, for he made only half of the third turn and struck on his forehead in the net. There was a snap like the report of a pistol, and the circus people all went pale. A dozen men sprang to the aid of the foolish fellow. Carefully they lifted him and laid him on the grass. But he was past human aid, for his neck had been broken.

He was just one more victim on the long list that had paid the price for the dangerous experiment.

That noon at dinner Mr. Bingham spoke very seriously to his great family.

There were tears in his eyes, and he had to stop more than once.

“ Friends,” he said, “ I am more sorry than I have words to tell, for what has happened. I myself have several times warned the young man against trying this dangerous experiment. We did not even dream of what he had in mind, or we would have stopped him. The lives of our performers we value much higher than any new and daring stunt.”

There was an incident that occurred during the parade in a small New England city which Freckles and Dapples never forgot. The dappled Shetland and the shiny phaeton always went just in front of the wagon carrying the lion cage. On this particular morning everything was going off just as usual. The bands were blaring, the calliopes shrieking, and clowns were shouting to make the people laugh, when of a sudden Freckles noticed a great commotion on the sidewalk just behind him. The disturbance was of such

a wild character that he turned his head and looked back. The sight that met his eyes struck terror to his own soul, although he was acquainted with all the ways of the circus.

One of the strong doors on the lion cage had swung partly open, and Leo, the largest of all the lions, was in the act of springing to the pavement. Even as Freckles gazed thunderstruck at the sight, the mighty cat leaped lightly to the street. Women shrieked, and some of them even fainted. Men caught up small children in their arms and fled with them through the doors of the nearest store. There was such a scramble as the main street of that quiet city had never seen before.

Meanwhile the innocent cause of the panic looked fearfully about. He seemed as much disturbed and afraid as the spectators. Then, seeing a clear space for a few rods along the pavement ahead, he trotted directly alongside of the phaeton drawn by Sir Wilton. This was enough

for Dapples, and he bolted. Freckles barely guided him by the wagon ahead, and then he brought up against a telephone pole and was thrown to the ground.

Freckles sprang out and sat upon his head until assistance came.

Just at this point in the *mêlée* two policemen appeared and began shooting at Leo with their revolvers.

They merely succeeded in wounding him slightly, but they did frighten him nearly to death.

Poor Leo, who had no savage intent toward any one, ran this way and that. Finally he spied a restaurant through whose open door a curious individual was peering out. It looked dark inside to the eyes of the hunted lion, and, before the onlookers realized what was happening, the great cat had reached the door with two springs and was through, sending the proprietor flat on his back.

As luck would have it, the eating-room was not filled with customers, as it would

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have been a little later, but several people were getting a hurried lunch preparatory to seeing the circus. A waiter had just appeared with a tray containing several cups of hot coffee.

As the beast in his flight made straight for him, the waiter hurled the tray of hot coffee full upon the lion's back. With a howl of pain the frightened beast dashed under a table, upsetting it, and sending the dishes crashing to the floor. This seemed to add to his fright, for he came out from under the table and made for the cellar door, which happened to be open, another waiter having just brought up a consignment of ice-cream.

Down the narrow stairs the terrified beast fled, taking the flight at two bounds. The proprietor of the eating-room by this time appeared, and locked and bolted the cellar door, making the escaped lord of the jungle a captive. Then the two policemen came and stood guard at the door.

By this time a report had spread on the

street that poor Leo had killed two people in the restaurant, and that he was eating one of them in the cellar.

Luckily at this point two of the lion keepers appeared, and, armed merely with clubs, went into the cellar. They found the much-maligned lion hiding away in a dark corner.

He was finally roped and dragged from his place of hiding, put into a temporary cage, and then carried back to the circus lot. When he was given the chance to get back into his own cage, he was the happiest lion in North America.

The local paper afterwards described him as a ferocious beast that had narrowly missed killing half a dozen people. It told of how he had been captured in his native jungle with the loss of the lives of several natives, and congratulated the city on having escaped with such small damage. As a matter of fact, Leo had been the most frightened creature on Main Street that day. He had also been born in captivity,

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and many of the circus people had played with him when he was a cub. So you cannot always believe all you read about the circus.

Thus it was that day after day and week after week, the life of Freckles and Dapples went on. They were constantly on the move. The first thing in the morning they unloaded and hurried away to the circus lot, and the last thing at night they loaded again and were off. It finally became as natural to them as any other life would have been, but it was never monotonous, and although they did the same thing each day, yet the experience was never the same. Putting up the white tented city and parading, showing twice, and then hurrying for the freight station does not sound like an extended program, but when you move a hundred miles each night between stands, and meet new conditions at each new place, things are bound to happen that are not on the program.

More and more, as the days went by,

Freckles learned to love the circus people. For the first time in his short life he experienced real love. Mr. Williams, Big Bill, the head canvas-man, the circus mother, and a dozen others Freckles claimed for his friends. Good friends they were, and true, for there is a sort of fraternity that attains in the circus. The hard daily grind and the risk that many of them run make them all brothers and sisters. That was why Mr. Bingham always called the circus people his family. They were always loyal to each other. If any one attacked any of the circus people, he attacked all. They stood together and they always stood for the circus.

With the children there was not a more popular feature in the whole show than the stunts of Freckles and Sir Wilton. They first attracted the little ones in the morning parade, and held their attention until the lights went out at night. This pleased Freckles greatly, for he had always felt himself as out of place in the world, but

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now he had found a work that was very pleasant, so the days and weeks were happy ones for both the boy and the little horse.

CHAPTER VII

THE CIRCUS WRECK AT CEDAR BEND

ONE of the ever-present bugbears of the circus management is railroad wrecks. An assistant manager for Barnum and Bailey tells that he was in thirteen wrecks in twelve years, and he thought himself lucky to escape with his life. This is not strange, for the circus trains are ever on the move. But even this would not account for so many wrecks, were it not for the fact that the trains are always run as specials, being shoved in between others, and often held up on sidings while the regular trains thunder by, so it is not strange that they often come to grief.

Moreover, no company will insure a circus against either accidents or fire. So the owners are their own insurance company,

and in a very bad wreck or fire small circuses often go bankrupt.

Freckles had heard little about train wrecks up to the time of the wreck at Cedar Bend. This will go down in history as the worst wreck in the annals of circus people. These people rarely speak of their dangers, but bluff them away with smiling faces. Many of the trapeze men and tumblers look death in the face each day, but they soon learn to cover up their fear and smile at danger.

Freckles had always felt as safe upon the train as he did off. He could sleep as well to the sound of rattling car-wheels and clicking rails, as he could to the night sounds in the country.

So the great wreck at Cedar Bend, to his boyish mind, came out of a clear sky. It might not have occurred, had not the American railroads been handling a very heavy consignment of United States troops.

It was during the first year that we were

in the great war, and troop-trains had the right of way.

Cedar Bend is a smoky, noisy, manufacturing town in Indiana. It is also a railroad junction of no mean order, so it is a place where trouble is liable to occur.

The first section of the circus outfit had come into town and had been shunted upon a switch. The second section had been following it very closely, instead of half an hour behind, which is the usual way, so the second section was standing on the main track.

Investigation has never fully established how it happened, but a troop-train crashed into the rear end of it, and at the same time a local freight crashed into the front end. Then switch-men in the yards saw a sight that they had rarely seen before. The train buckled, and ten of the heavy cars reared in air. It looked for all the world like a huge serpent that had reared its back. This of course broke all the couplings, so the cars came down in a

sorry heap and went tumbling and crashing this way and that. Three of the cars almost immediately burst into flames. This was the section that contained many of the best ring and trick horses, and also the large animals like the elephants and camels. It was also the section in which rode our two friends, Freckles and Dapples. Freckles himself was in the second sleeper from the locomotive, and Sir Wilton was about midway in the train.

The whistle on one of the wrecked locomotives, being turned on by the smash, set up a continuous shriek, while the other engine emitted a roaring stream of steam, that made more noise than the whistle.

If a combination to produce blood-curdling sounds had been planned, it could not have outdone the noise made by this medley of wild animals, many of them horribly mangled and some of them imprisoned in the burning cars.

There was the trumpeting and shrieking of elephants, the roaring of lions, the

neighing of horses and camels, the braying and hehawing of zebras, and a chorus of cries from smaller animals that added to the infernal din.

Soldiers swarmed from the troop-train and hurried to the assistance of the circus people. If it had not been that so many capable men were at hand, the fatalities would have been much greater. As it was, in almost no time several hundred men were breaking windows and chopping holes in the sides of cars and releasing struggling horses and men. The animals which seemed to be hopelessly maimed were mercifully shot, as were those threatened by the flames. All of the elephants but one whose back had been broken, burst out of their cars and stampeded through the crowd. One of the lion cages was broken open and two scared lions fled through the crowd, also.

The first thing that Freckles noticed out of the ordinary was a sudden lifting of his berth. It seemed to be rising straight up

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with him, and bits of glass were pelting his hands and face. Then something struck his head, and he felt a queer, faint, sinking sensation and all was dark.

Five minutes later several brawny soldiers had broken their way into the half-telescoped sleeper, where eight of the circus people were dead, and lifted poor Freckles from his splintered berth and tenderly placed him in an ambulance. Two of his best friends were in the ambulance ahead of him.

Big Bill, the head canvas-man, was suffering from two broken legs, while Mr. Williams had luckily escaped with a dislocated shoulder and a sprained ankle, and several cuts from flying glass.

As the ambulance moved away, Big Bill lifted himself up on his elbow and looked outside.

“My God, Williams!” he said. “Look here, and tell me what you think of this. If it doesn’t beat anything I ever came across in the ten wrecks I have been

through." Mr. Williams peeped through the window, and saw a dappled Shetland pony following the ambulance, his nose close to the side of the car, as though he feared it would get away from him, and he was running on three legs.

Big Bill brushed the tears from his eyes and swore softly under his breath, while Mr. Williams tried hard to cover his own feelings.

"Do you think that Sir Wilton knows the boy is inside?" asked the manager at length.

"Knows he is inside?" fairly snorted Bill. "Why, man alive, of course he does. Do you think he would be chasing the ambulance like that, on three legs, if he didn't? I tell you, Williams, I have seen some circus horses in my day. I have seen the best of them come and go, but I never in my blooming life saw a horse that loved his driver as Dapples does the kid."

"Well," returned Mr. Williams, "I guess that is so. I have seen some good

drivers and horsemen in my day, and I never saw a driver small or big who loved a horse as Freckles does Sir Wilton."

"You're right, Williams," returned the big fellow gruffly.

At this point in the conversation Mr. Williams spoke to the driver of the ambulance, and bade him go slow, that Sir Wilton might keep up.

The first thing that Freckles remembered after the sensation that his berth in the sleeper was rising up with him, was that of being in a clean white bed in a long quiet room. There were many other beds in this room,—a long row of them,—and on the pillow of each bed was a head, and all were the heads of children. Just what they were doing there he could not imagine. His own thoughts were all in a jumble. His head ached terribly, and there was a queer bag on it. It seemed to be full of something very cold. When he moved his head and pressed it against the contents of the bag, it felt better.

A pleasant young woman, whom he did not think he had ever seen before, came to him now and then and did something for him. In fact, this young woman was constantly going up and down the room. There was also a friendly man, who wore a large pair of glasses. He came to see him twice a day, but who he was, poor Freckles could not even imagine.

He tried and tried to think where he was, or who these people might be, but could not. When he asked the young woman, she explained it all to him, but even then he could not make it clear.

When she said something about a wreck and Bingham and Daily's circus, he thought he ought to understand; but he could not. So she finally told him not to bother his head about it, but that it would all come right soon.

The first thing that he did realize was the name of his friend, Sir Wilton.

He smiled up at the nurse.

"Yes," he said, "seems to me I did

know him. He was a wonderful little horse. I used to ride him up in the pasture at the poor-farm."

"No," said the nurse. "It was in the circus. Bingham and Daily's big show. Don't you remember? You know it was wrecked last week."

"The circus was wrecked?" asked Freckles incredulously, showing interest for the first time. "Was that what made my berth rise up so quickly?"

Then a clutch of great fear seized the half-delirious boy.

"Oh, lady!" he cried. "What became of Dapples? My little horse! The one I used to ride! Was he killed?"

"Oh, no," replied the nurse quickly. "He is all right. The circus man had him brought to a stable right near the hospital, and when you are well, you can ride him."

But at this point poor Freckles's mind went cloudy again.

"Dapples was killed in the wreck," he moaned. "There was a wreck and he

was killed in it. I sha'n't ever see him again."

Vainly the nurse tried to explain to him that Dapples was all right, and that he would see him soon, but she could not get out of the boy's head the idea that Sir Wilton had been killed.

As Freckles insisted on the following day that Sir Wilton had been killed, and seemed much worse, the steward at the hospital, without telling any one, after getting leave of the superintendent, tried a novel experiment. He had read once of how Archie Roosevelt had been sick, and Kermit, his brother, had conceived the idea that if he could see his favorite pony it would cure him. So Kermit had coaxed the pony into the elevator at the White House, and had conducted the small horse safely to his brother's room on the third floor. If that sort of thing could be done in the White House, it could be done in the hospital, especially as the children's ward was on the first floor.

About three o'clock that afternoon the children in the ward saw the strangest sight ever beheld in the hospital. This was when the groom from the stable led Sir Wilton into the ward and down to the cot of his driver.

At first Freckles thought he was asleep, and that it was all a dream, but when Dapples's nose touched his hand he was convinced. The nurse would only let the pony stay a very few minutes, but this was enough to convince Freckles that his friend was alive and well.

This was the turning point in Freckles's sickness. It broke the delirium, and from that day on he mended rapidly. In a week's time he was placed in a wheel-chair and wheeled out on a large piazza, where the groom again brought Sir Wilton for a longer visit. Two weeks from that day Freckles again rode the small horse. He did not go alone, though, for the groom walked by his side and led the pony, and even held Freckles in the saddle, but

it was a start. After that each day the groom came and they took a short ride.

Just a month after Freckles had been brought to the hospital he was able to go alone with Dapples, and they had a fine long ride in the country.

Freckles was all eagerness to be back with the circus, but Mr. Williams would not hear of it. He said the boy needed rest after such a shake-up as that. So he arranged to board both horse and rider at a small hotel on the outskirts of Cedar Bend, where they were to remain until the circus went into winter quarters in about a month.

So Freckles and Dapples spent a very happy month, taking long excursions into the country. But the boy was not content to be wholly idle, so he taught Sir Wilton several new tricks with which to surprise Mr. Williams. The circus people had been so good to him that he wanted to repay them in some way.

Freckles also took this time to write long letters to Pickles and Beany.

He painted the circus life in gay colors, but always wound up with the earnest assurance that they were much better off at home.

The circus wreck made thrilling reading for the two chums, and they showed Freckles's letters to all the other boys in the town.

Finally, on a chilly day in late November, both Sir Wilton and his driver started on the long trip to California, where the circus was to go into winter quarters. But they could not go together, much as Freckles wished they might, for Sir Wilton had to travel in a freight car, while his driver went on a passenger train.

Freckles knew that he would arrive in California several days ahead of his small companion, but he tried to be patient, for they would be together again for the winter, with leisure for long drives in the land of sunshine.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAND OF SUNSHINE

TO a simple country boy like Freckles, who had scarcely been outside his own town before he joined the circus, the trip across the great western plains to California was a revelation. If he was amazed at the endless stretches of western prairie land, he was still more amazed at the sight of the Rockies with their snow-capped peaks. Higher and higher the train mounted, until the summit was reached, and then they dropped down into the land of sunshine, so beloved by all Californians.

They did not stop in the middle of the state, but journeyed southward toward Los Angeles, down into the southern portion of the state, and finally Freckles

alighted at the small town where the circus had its winter quarters.

Mr. Williams was at the station to meet the boy, and he greeted him with almost a father's affection.

"Well, Freckles, my son," said the old circus man, "I am mighty glad to see you. You are certainly looking fit. It was a close call you had, but both you and Sir Wilton came out all right. How is the little horse?"

"Oh, he's just fine! He gets brighter and brighter every day. I have been teaching him some new tricks. I am going to surprise you when we show again."

Mr. Williams led the way to the circus headquarters, where everybody was already settling down to the winter task of repairing the damage and wear of the season just passed. Some would go home or seek other jobs, but many would stay all winter. The girls and women, under the direction of the circus mother, would repair the costumes and trappings and at-

tend to the wardrobes of each member. So, although they were supposed to be laid off, yet it would be a busy season.

Sir Wilton did not arrive for nearly a week, and Freckles was very impatient until he came. When he did finally appear, the boy left his dinner untasted and hurried away to the freight yard for his friend. If Freckles was glad to see Dapples, the Shetland was also delighted to see his driver, and he nickered and pawed vigorously until he was unloaded, and then went nosing into Freckles's pockets, to see if he could find a lump of sugar, and, sure enough, he did.

Freckles and Sir Wilton at once set to exploring as much of southern California as they could reach in every direction by a day's ride.

The beautiful country was quite different from anything Freckles had ever seen. The great eucalyptus trees and the catalpas, the fruit farms, especially the prune orchards and citrus groves, asparagus

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fields, and the strange little patchwork farms of the Japanese, all made him open his eyes with wonder.

Of course there was the rainy season to reckon with. It rained an hour or two each day, but the earth was always so fresh and beautiful after it that they did not mind. Freckles had never imagined that there was a country where he could hear the quail whistling all through the winter, and where roses would bloom nearly the whole year through.

The strawberries, also, which were just as plenty in winter as in summer, were always in evidence on the table. Truly it was a wonderful country.

Then, for diversion, some of the moving-picture people hired the elephants and camels for pictures. Freckles was allowed to go along and see the fun. He saw battles between the drivers of heavily loaded caravans and dark Moors. He saw elephant hunts, and cowboy stunts that even amazed him, good horseman that he was.

Then Mr. Williams got leave from Mr. Bingham for Freckles and Sir Wilton to show in some of the local theaters. Dapples was so small that he trotted about on the theater stage like a large dog. He and Freckles were prime favorites with the children, and they became the *matinée* idols of southern California. Mr. Bingham allowed the boy half of what he made in this way, so that he saved several hundred dollars that winter. This amount the circus mother carefully hoarded for him.

The only tragic event in the circus that winter was a fire that came very near taking both Freckles and Sir Wilton from the show. It would seem that a circus, when in its winter quarters, would be perfectly safe, but this is not the case. Many of the large buildings in which the animals, birds, and snakes are kept, have to be artificially heated.

These heating plants are temporary and very crude, so that fires often occur. This,

in fact, is the circus owner's winter bugbear.

Mr. P. T. Barnum lost nearly his entire circus through a big fire at Bridgeport, Connecticut, one winter, and he was burned out in New York City the same year.

The California fire started in the snake house. These reptiles are very sluggish in winter, and it is well not to let them get too thoroughly chilled. The bird house is also artificially heated, and the monkeys, which are tropical animals, have to be kept warm.

No one knew how the fire started. Perhaps it was set. The managers had discharged a couple of workmen the day before. The circus buildings were several blocks away from the main part of the town, so that the fire had gained considerable headway before it was discovered or word could be sent to the fire department.

When Mr. Williams and Freckles ar-

rived on the scene, the snake house, in which were also the monkeys, the tropical birds, and many of the more delicate animals, was wrapped in flames. Most of the animals had been taken out.

Freckles gave the snake house only a hurried glance, and then sped away to several long, low buildings where the horses were kept.

These had been prune storehouses. In fact, nearly all the buildings now occupied by the circus had belonged to a bankrupt prune farm.

Several of the grooms slept in these buildings, so when Freckles arrived, he found a long row of most valuable circus horses lined up like cavalry horses, with their bridles snapped together and several men holding them. Of course Freckles's first thought was for Sir Wilton.

Up and down the line of restless steeds he raced, looking for his friend. None of the grooms had seen him, but they thought of course he was out of the building.

Finally Freckles, in his mad search, stumbled on a groom who had seen him.

“ I am afraid he is in the building, boy,” he said. “ I saw him there, and tried to get him out, but he would not come. He was as spunky as a mule. So I said to him, ‘ Stay and burn if you want to, you little fool.’ ”

A cordon of rope surrounded the burning building, and several bluecoats stood around it, perhaps thirty feet apart.

“ Whereabouts in the building was he? ” asked Freckles, feigning not to care.

“ In the third stall at this end. He is not far from the door, but the roof is liable to fall in any minute.”

The groom turned to speak to one of the policemen, and Freckles slipped under the rope.

“ Here, here, boy. What are you doing? Come back! For God’s sake, come back,” cried the policeman. “ It is sure death to go in there.”

Freckles paid no attention to this warn-

ing, but ran like a streak for the partly open door. A second later he slipped inside, and the dark, seething, burning building had hidden him from sight.

Freckles's first impression, as he darted into the flaming building, was that he could never live in it long enough to find Dapples. The smoke was so thick that he could scarcely draw a breath, while the flames in a more distant portion of the building roared and crackled ominously.

Should he go back, or should he go forward? The policeman had called to him to come back, perhaps he ought to. But then, in a flash, he thought of a hundred loving little acts of Dapples. How he had rubbed his face against his cheek in the hospital. How his soft lips went feeling over his hands, or prospecting curiously in his pocket for sugar. Sometimes it had seemed to Freckles, as he leaned against the little horse in the big top, where thousands of people were staring at them both, that he could fairly feel love come from

him. Dapples had, in some unaccountable way, discovered him, when he was lifted from the wrecked sleeper and placed in the ambulance, and then had trotted on three legs to the hospital after him. Would he be less faithful than the little horse? No, not even if he burned to a crisp. He had come into the building to rescue his friend, and he would accomplish that feat or die in the attempt. Anyhow, life would not be worth living if he lost Dapples, so they might just as well burn together.

With this brave assurance, Freckles seemed to take heart. He held his head as low as he could, as the smoke was much thinner near the ground. So, with one hand thrust out in front of him in order to ward off danger, he crept forward. He reached the first stall, and felt between the partitions, but it was empty. Carefully he made his way forward to the second; that also was empty. Then he went forward to the third. The groom had said

that Sir Wilton was in the third stall. The smoke was now so thick that it choked him terribly. It did not seem to him that he could draw another breath, but Dapples must be saved.

He reached the third stall and put out his hand, but that was as empty as the rest had been. Freckles groaned aloud, and nearly sank to the floor with a sudden weakness that came over him.

Then he remembered something which was almost like an inspiration.

He had taught Sir Wilton to neigh in answer to a shrill whistle. This was the way they talked. He would whistle and Dapples would nicker.

Perhaps the trick would help them now. So Freckles put his two fingers between his lips and blew a shrill whistle. To his great joy, the Shetland nickered, and the sound was very close to him.

He must be in the very next stall. The groom had been mistaken. He was in the fourth stall instead of the third. Joyously

Freckles slipped in beside his pony friend and felt for the halter rope, but in his haste he pulled the rope the wrong way, and instead of having it come untied with almost a single pull, it tightened into a hard knot.

Frantically Freckles worked at the knot, but it was very persistent.

Some one was shouting and calling from the doorway for him to come out.

When he had nearly despaired of ever getting the rope untied, the knot yielded and Sir Wilton was free.

Then Freckles remembered that the groom had said Dapples was as stubborn as a mule. He had often read of horses that would not let their best friends lead them from a burning building until they were blindfolded. Would Sir Wilton fail him now he had risked so much?

He did not think so, but he would take no chances. So he slapped the little horse in a friendly way that he had when he wanted immediate and prompt obedience

from him, and backed him out of the stall.

The smoke and the heat were now becoming unendurable. With all possible haste, he groped his way blindly to the door. He must be quick if he would save both himself and Dapples. The smoke was choking him like a great hand laid upon his throat. It also seemed that a heavy weight was on his chest. Then he stumbled into the outer daylight where strong hands caught both him and the end of Dapples's halter. They had barely dragged the two to safety when the roof fell in and a great shower of sparks flamed up to the heavens. It was a mighty close call, as Big Bill said, but, even so, Freckles fainted as he saw the building collapse.

He came back to life, however, a few minutes later, and found himself lying on the grass, while half a dozen of the circus people crowded about him.

"Is Sir Wilton all right?" he gasped feebly.

“You bet he is, and so are you,” said Mr. Williams cheerily. “You just want a few minutes to get your wind.”

It seemed to Freckles that he would want a long time to get back his breath and his strength, for now that the danger was all over he was scared nearly out of his wits. He wondered how he could ever have done it. But it had been worth the effort, even if he had fainted. Sir Wilton had stuck by him when he was half dead in the wrecked train, and he had stood by the little horse. They would always stand by each other as long as Sir Wilton lived.

And he remembered with a thrill of joy that Shetlands lived in some cases for thirty or even forty years. He and Dapples would yet have joyous days.

The following noon at dinner Mr. Bingham told the story of the heroic rescue to his now sadly diminished family, as they gathered in the special dining-room which they occupied at a small hotel. While he praised Freckles's act, yet he warned his

employees against taking too great risks to save the animals under such conditions. "Because," he concluded, "you know we can buy Shetlands and any of the other animals that we may lose, but a human life cannot be duplicated."

Mr. Bingham was very kind, and Freckles appreciated his generous words, but just the same he knew that they could not buy another Dapples, not even with all Mr. Bingham's money.

But the rank and file of the circus people agreed with Freckles. Many of them would have done the same thing for the animals they loved. So they made up a purse for the boy, who was thunderstruck to find that it contained two hundred dollars.

This is the way the great circus family sticks together. They are true brothers and sisters. If one is in trouble, all are in trouble. No men or women in the world will dig deeper into their pockets for their friends, or a good cause, than they.

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So it was that Freckles and Dapples wormed their way a little deeper into the kind hearts of their friends. More and more of that human love, which is so essential to our happiness, surrounded them and made them very glad, glad that they were alive and that they belonged to each other.

“Dapples, old pal,” said Freckles confidentially one day as he put the small saddle on Sir Wilton, preparatory to taking a ten-mile ride into the country, “I am going to save up my money. Every cent I get I am going to save, and some day I am going to buy you of Mr. Bingham. Then we will leave the circus and go back home and be happy all the rest of our lives. What do you think of that, Dapples?”

Dapples thought it was fine, and said so as plainly as a small horse could, with several glad whinnies. Then Freckles sprung into the saddle, and they were off, to the glad rhythm of small hoofs.

CHAPTER IX

SHIPWRECKED ON THE SPANISH MAIN

IN the very early spring the circus people were astir. They had been idle too long. The expenses for the winter months were enormous, so the great machine must be set to work repairing the losses. Once again the three gaudy, gilded sections were loaded. The cars and the wagons had all been freshly painted, and much of the canvas had been renewed, so it was more of a gilded wonderland than ever. The circus first made glad the hearts of all the children, as well as of their elders, in southern California, by showing in all the large cities in that section. Then they came through Texas to Louisiana.

Frequently in these States the large cities were a long distance apart, so sometimes the circus people only showed every other day. They found the people of the South, both white and black, a pleasure-loving folk, and easy to please. It was quite different from what it had been years before in the South, when the rowdyish element of the city would band together to break up the show. Freckles never tired of listening to Big Bill's tales of wild fights with southern gun-men. When the rowdies had fairly started a fight, the brawny canvas-men would pull up the stakes with iron rings in the end and charge them, striking to kill. Many a man was buried in the place where the three great rings had been, and the circus went on its way, telling no tales and asking no questions. If their own men were killed, they said nothing. If they had to kill their assailants, they were equally reticent.

So, by slow degrees, they worked their way up to the north. At New York they

stopped for three weeks, and Freckles and Dapples had the supreme test of playing before a Madison Square audience, just as Pickles had said they would. So when June came round they were once more showing in New England, and rapidly approaching Freckles's own home town, where they were billed to show just as they had the year before.

When they at last drew up on the siding in the very freight yard where Freckles, Pickles, and Beany had first seen the long trains enter, Freckles's heart was pounding so he could scarcely breathe.

Eagerly he peeped out of the window, and could hardly believe his eyes when he saw Pickles and Beany astride the top board of that famous fence, and half a dozen other boys with them. He hurried into his clothes, and, without waiting to wash his face, ran forth to greet his friends.

“Hello, Pickles; hello, Beany; hello, fellers. Don't you all know me?”

Pickles and Beany rubbed their eyes and looked at him wonderingly. Then both came down from the fence with a spring, as did the other boys.

“Hello, Freckles, old top; put it there,” cried Pickles.

“Me too,” said Beany. “We are mighty glad to see you. We have been here since three o’clock, but we didn’t think you were with the show. We didn’t know what had become of you when we saw that Leslie Atherton chap was a-driving Sir Wilton.

“We was afraid you was dead. We read about the wreck.”

“No,” said Freckles gleefully. “I ain’t dead. I thought I had told you fellers that I had a circus name. They all does. I guess I forgot to write you that. But I am mighty glad to see you fellers. I tell you, boys, the old town does look good. It has made me feel mighty queer coming back here again. Me and Sir Wilton thinks the world of each other, and I

like the circus, but it ain't just the sort of life for a boy, neither.

“ You don't stay still in one place long enough to like anything. You can't get any sort of roots. You—you ——”

Seeing that Pickles and Beany were looking very much dismayed, Freckles changed the subject. “ Oh, the circus people are bully,” he said. “ They are the best folks in the whole world, only a feller like me ought to be going to school and making friends. But I am going to ask Mr. Williams for some tickets for you, Beany and Pickles, and after the show we will go out to the old pile of lumber where we sat a year ago, and I will tell you all about it. I have got to get Sir Wilton and go to the lot now. Guess I won't have any trouble in finding this lot. So long, fellers.”

Freckles had tipped his chums off not to say anything about his being with the circus, so that not half a dozen people in the great audience recognized him as the freckle-faced waif from the poor-farm

To Freckles's great relief, Mr. Perkins did not appear, so he was spared that ordeal.

Probably Freckles had never performed before two such ardent admirers as Pickles and Beany, sitting on the top seat in the big top, munching peanuts.

By half-past four the three chums had rendezvoused at the lumber pile, and were ready for the conclave.

"Freckles," said Pickles solemnly, when they had listened breathlessly to Freckles's glowing accounts of circus life, and especially of the wreck and the fire, "me and Beany has determined that the circus is the only life for us. We are planning to run away and follow your show. We packed our things this forenoon, and we want you to speak to the manager for us this afternoon."

Freckles gazed at his two chums in astonishment. Then he burst into a hearty laugh. "I thought you fellers were in earnest at first," he said, "but I see now you was just joking."

“Joking!” chorused the two. “We ain’t joking. We want to go with the circus. Honest Injun, we do!”

Freckles looked at his chums for several seconds before he could find his voice. Then he spoke very solemnly and with great emphasis.

“Boys,” he said, “the circus is all right for them that has to follow it. I ain’t saying a word against it. They are awful good to me. They are the best friends I ever had, ’cepting you fellers. But here’s the point. You have both got something that I ain’t. You have got homes and friends that will stay in one place long enough for you to know how they look. The circus people have only themselves. They haven’t any home. Of course, some of them who are lucky have homes they go to in the winter, and mighty glad they are to see them. But you fellers have homes and friends and school, and a chance to make something of yourselves. But I have only the circus. The circus is all

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right, but me and Dapples is goin' to quit it as soon as I can get money enough to buy him."

Then Freckles told his two friends of his secret plans to save his money and purchase Sir Wilton. "You see, I can't ever leave the circus without him. It would break my heart. He wouldn't be happy unless he had me, so we have got to stick together."

For half an hour Freckles argued and expostulated, until at last his friends saw their mistake and promised to stay at home. But Freckles did finally agree that they might put their savings into the fund to purchase Sir Wilton, if he was unable to save enough himself.

Even while the boys were talking, the sun touched the western hilltops, and Freckles hurried away to the dining top for his supper. The circus never stops for friendships, nor for any other minor consideration. So after the night performance, and after the sections had been

loaded, the three chums again said good-bye, just as they had a year before, and the trains rolled away into the darkness.

The summer was a very pleasant one, with not too much rainy weather and yet with just enough to lay the dust. Freckles and Dapples grew steadily in popularity with the crowds, and that was very gratifying both to Freckles and to the management. If Dapples was proud of his share in the performances, he said nothing, but he really carried himself as though he was.

In the autumn Mr. Bingham sprung a surprise upon his great family. It was about the time that they usually headed for the Pacific coast and their winter quarters.

It seemed that one of the strong South American governments had given them a good guarantee to bring the Great American Show to that country. It was also suggested that they might like to show in the rest of South America. The people

there had never seen a full-fledged American show, and they were all eagerness for its coming.

Mr. Bingham asked for a rising vote as to whether his great family would like to take the trip, and nearly every one arose.

“ Good,” he said. “ I will close the contract at once. It will be a great experience for us all.”

So in November, Freckles found himself one day watching the loading of the elephants onto a great ship. Most of the animals had been taken aboard on the gangplanks, but the elephants balked at this method of embarking. So strong harnesses had been made for the pachyderms, and, when everything was in readiness, a mighty crane reached down and lifted them bodily on board. It did not matter that they roared, trumpeted, shrieked, and lashed out with their trunks. For once they had met a power that was stronger than they.

Finally every last article belonging to

the circus had been loaded. The ninety-odd gilded and gaudy cars were all there, as were all the wagons and cages.

For a week everything went well. It was a wonderful experience for Freckles. He kept his eyes wide open and saw how everything was done. He went to every corner of the great ship, even down into its very depths and saw the stokers at work.

During this trip he also made several new friends among the circus people. Each day he was allowed to parade Dapples up and down the deck to give him exercise, although this privilege was denied the rest of the horses.

But one night, when they had been out about two weeks, the winds began to kick up quite a sea and the captain said they were in for a storm. To make the night even more eventful, Tom Kennedy, the oldest and most famous bareback horse in the world, died. He had not been well since they left New York. This was not

surprising, as he was thirty-six years old. Mr. Bingham's only idea in taking him to South America had been to allow the people there to see the most famous circus horse in the world.

Two of the riders who had grown up with old Tom stood by the rail and wept when the veterinary told them that Tom was dead. They were not ashamed of their tears. Nor did the circus people think it strange that they wept. Tom was greatly loved by all the riders, as well as by many of the drivers, who knew a fine horse when they saw it.

The following morning the storm had abated, and all was made ready for Tom's funeral. His body was first carefully brushed and his long mane combed and straightened. Then he was wrapped in a canvas winding-sheet.

A double row of the circus people lined up by the rail, while one of their number read the chapter from the book of Job about the horse, a portion of Holy Writ

which is little known, yet it is the most beautiful tribute to the horse ever phrased.

Tom's oldest rider gave a graphic history of the noble horse. Then, amid a hush that was broken only by the sobs of Tom's two drivers, the faithful steed was lowered into the Caribbean, where he sank to his long sleep.

But he was not the only animal to find a watery grave on that memorable trip, for the monkeys began having pneumonia shortly after they left New York, and it was a quiet day when they did not fling one or more of them into the Atlantic.

This opening storm on the night that old Tom died seemed to be a precursor of many stormy, nasty days. Each day they thought the weather would clear, but there finally developed a series of November gales so much feared by seamen. These were occasionally interspersed with Central American hurricanes, which, in spite of all the sailors could do, blew the ships far out of their course.

These hurricanes would lash up the water until it filled the air with flying spume, like yeast. It would be so thick that one could catch handfuls of it. Under such conditions the captain could only depend on his compass and allow the best he could for the wind and the strong undercurrents.

It was just the sort of weather to invite disaster, so it was no wonder that, one evening, when the captain had estimated that they were not far off the Colombian coast, that the ship on which Freckles and Dapples sailed, struck a reef and stuck fast. Then, as though in utter disdain of the powers of man, the clouds rolled away and the setting sun appeared, showing a low coast line about a mile away.

But if the clouds disappeared and the sun appeared, the winds did not abate. Instead, they piled up great billows that rolled constantly against the helpless ship, and ground the sharp-toothed reef deeper and deeper into her side.

Three of the four life-boats had been carried away the night before by a comber that they had experienced, when they could not guard against it. So the ship was left with but one boat, to add to its other misfortunes.

The captain soon decided that the vessel could not live until morning with the continual grinding on the reef, so the boat was lowered and the women and children were placed in it. It was not at all certain that it would ever reach the shore, but the attempt had to be made. At the suggestion of Mr. Williams, the circus riders led their mounts on to the lower deck, which was partly submerged with water, and jumped them over the rail in a brave attempt to swim with them to the shore. The shore was about a mile away, and almost any good horse will swim that distance.

Freckles and Dapples were among the last of the riders to take to the sea. Mr. Williams hated to see the boy and the

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small horse fighting for their lives, but he finally saw that it was inevitable.

So he went with them to the lower deck and gave them his blessing.

“Don’t try to ride him,” said Mr. Williams. “It will make him too low in the water. Just lie in the water by his side, with your arm over his neck. You had better cling to his mane, so that you will not get separated from him.

“He is a brave little horse. He will give his last ounce of strength for you. I am sure you will reach the shore all right. When you get there, look for the others and all keep together. God only knows what sort of country it is yonder.”

Mr. Williams stooped down and kissed the boy and gave him a big hug.

Then Freckles led Sir Wilton close to the rail, and, with a slap on his side, jumped him over. The little horse had barely struck the water when his young rider caught hold of his mane with a grip that nothing but death could break.

Dapples was bridled, and Freckles had noted carefully the direction of the shore, so he headed Dapples for it.

“Keep the ship at your back all the way, and you cannot go wrong,” Mr. Williams had said. So Freckles occasionally looked back to see that the ship was behind them.

Until they got used to the surf and could rise and fall with it a bit, it nearly covered them. But presently Dapples struck his swimming stride. It seemed to Freckles that he merely walked through the water.

He did not pant as Freckles did, and he was not frightened.

So it is that a dog or a horse, when it finds itself in deep water, just walks naturally in it, and this makes them the best of swimmers.

For half an hour, and it seemed like a week to Freckles, Sir Wilton swam steadily. It was a terrible sensation for the boy, knowing that the sea beneath him was bottomless as far as he was concerned.

He was not at all sure that they would ever reach the shore, although Mr. Williams had said they would. Freckles wondered what it would feel like to drown. Would his chums at home know what had become of him?

Would he ever see Mr. Williams again? Many of the animals he knew were doomed.

As the minutes went by, Freckles saw to his great alarm that Dapples was swimming slower and slower. He was getting tired. Would he hold out?

Freckles himself paddled away for dear life with his free arm, and also did some frantic kicking, but it did not seem to help very much.

At last it seemed to him that they were not moving at all. Then he discovered that Dapples was resting and merely keeping afloat. But finally he got his wind again, and they started slowly forward.

But the ship was getting smaller and

smaller, so surely they were making headway.

One minute Freckles was buoyant with hope, and then the next he was sure they would both sleep in the Caribbean sea with poor Tom Kennedy.

Finally, when despair of ever reaching the coast had clutched Freckles, although he knew it was not far distant, his foot touched something hard. He reached about frantically with it and discovered that he was standing on solid beach. Almost at the same instant Sir Wilton stood up on solid sand and began walking ashore.

They had reached the shore at a spot where the beach was very sloping, and this had saved them two hundred feet of swimming and perhaps their lives.

Eagerly and gratefully they waded ashore, and when they were once up on firm land, Sir Wilton shook himself, and then with a deep sigh lay down to rest.

Freckles knew by this that he was all in.

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He had never seen him lie down to rest before. So he sat on the sand with the little horse's head in his lap, talking to him while he dozed and rested.

It was a strange and terrible night. The sea thundered at their backs, and the great forest before them was full of strange sounds.

Freckles knew not what the night would bring forth, yet he felt sure that since God had protected them from the sea He would keep them from this new danger, so he watched with Sir Wilton and was glad they were alive.

CHAPTER X

THE RESCUE

TO poor Freckles, sitting upon the sand of the beach, on the edge of a vast, dark, tropical forest, with the Southern Cross and the countless stars above him, and wild, weird sounds on every hand, this night was a night of terrors.

Mr. Williams had told him to find the others when he landed, and for all to keep together, but the rest had swam ashore nearly an hour before he had, as Mr. Williams wished Freckles and Dapples to stay on the ship if possible.

Freckles had not been able to guide Sir Wilton straight to the shore, and, as a result, he had landed in a small cove nearly a mile from the spot where a score of the

circus riders and their mounts were now sleeping on the sands.

So, to all intents and purposes, Freckles and Dapples were alone.

The boy realized, with a great sense of love in his heart, how much more alone he would have been without the little horse. He was as affectionate as a dog, and, although he could not express his love in as many ways as a dog could, yet he managed, by rubbing his nose against his master's cheek, and by caressing his face with his lips, to tell him that he loved him with all the devotion of his horse heart.

From time to time signal rockets went up from the ship, so Freckles knew that she had not yet sunk. He thought of Mr. Williams and all the rest who had stuck by the ship, and wondered vaguely if he would ever see them again.

Truly this life of the circus was a strange one, and his own had been even too full of thrills of late for his comfort.

The booming of the surf on the low

sandspit Freckles understood, but the great dark forest in front of him was filled with terrifying sounds which he did not understand.

He could see dimly that the trees were very large, so large in fact that he could not tell where one left off and another began. Their tops seemed to interlace like one great canopy. The undergrowth was also very thick, and one would have needed a hatchet to have penetrated very far in it. But the sounds from the unknown depths terrified him even more than its solemn vastness. Great bats as large as birds went zigzagging overhead. At first Freckles thought they were birds, but he finally decided they were bats. Strange birds screamed in the forest, and Freckles concluded these were parrots. The captain had told him the day before that the islands along shore were alive with parrots and cockatoos.

But the strangest of all the sounds was a continuous roaring of great volume and

awful persistence. This was produced by a colony of roaring monkeys, that were having a midnight carousal.

The jaguar was also out that night for prey. Several times Freckles heard his cry in the distance. Then, for a long time, he was still, but presently there was a terrific struggle in the underbrush within a hundred feet of them. The boy heard a pathetic bleating, and wondered what sort of animal had paid the price of being smaller and more defenseless than his fellow.

The jaguar had obtained his midnight supper. He had surprised a doe and her fawn, and had pulled the fawn down and killed it. It was a small South American deer, just the sort of supper for a hungry jaguar.

Later on, farther away in the woods, Freckles heard another death struggle.

This time a huge snake had reached down from an overhead branch where it was watching, and taken an ant-eater,—

just another of the tragedies of the South American forest, which teems with life, and where the life-and-death struggle goes on ceaselessly.

It seemed to the weary, terrified boy that the daylight would never come. He felt sure, if the daylight did come, that these sounds of fights-to-the-death about him would cease, for it is in the night that most of the jungle-hunting is done.

At last, about daybreak, he fell asleep and dreamed he was back in the ring with Sir Wilton. For a wonder, Dapples was troubling him with his tricks. He continually got his signals mixed and did the wrong trick, which made the audience laugh. Freckles was so troubled about this that he awoke. He found the sun shining brightly. To his great joy he heard shouts along the shore not far distant. He answered, and started with all haste to make his way in the direction from which they had come.

In five minutes he had gained a small

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beach where the score of circus people had slept during the long night. He was more delighted to see them than he had ever been to see any human beings before.

To their great joy they discovered that the ship from which they had fled the night before had not sunk after all. A sister ship was standing by, to which the passengers and animals were being transferred.

Two hours later a boat put off, and arrangements were made for bringing the marooned circus riders back to the ship.

Freckles sat in the stern of a life-boat, while Sir Wilton, supported by four life-preservers, swam easily behind.

This score of riders were the most delighted beings that ever set foot upon a solid deck after braving the teeth of an angry sea for hours and sleeping on a lonely South American beach.

The following day the now too thoroughly crowded ship hailed a tramp steamer headed for Rio de Janeiro, which was her own destination. As the tramp

was returning with little cargo, some of the animals and circus people were transferred to her, and all went on their way rejoicing, feeling that they had escaped miraculously.

Arrived at Rio de Janeiro, the ninety gaudy circus cars were transferred, first to a ferry-boat, and then to one of the leading South American railroads. So two days after the big American show landed on South American soil they were once more bumping over the rails in the accustomed manner, showing every day or two. But the accommodations for exhibiting, and especially for feeding the circus, were not as good as in the United States, notwithstanding the fact that the advance agents and buyers had done everything possible.

Nor had the advertising been neglected. For weeks small South American urchins, of all degrees of blackness, from the swarthy Spaniard to the native, black as a coal, had been gaping open-mouthed at

the circus posters which informed them in glowing Spanish all about the big show. Nor were the children the only ones who gazed spellbound at the posters, for many of the South Americans of mixed blood are little more than children in the ways of the world and its wonders. So it was a very easily pleased audience before which the circus played. The only thing that they had ever witnessed that approached the circus in any degree was the Spanish bull-fight.

A lot of the circus people went to a bull-fight one Sunday, when the president and some of the other high Brazilian officials were present.

Now the circus people as a class are very devoted animal-lovers, and they denounced the bull-fight among themselves as a bloody spectacle belonging more to the dark ages than to the present enlightened century. One bull-fight was enough for most of them, so they rarely patronized the Sunday shows after that first day.

When Freckles and Dapples rode about the South American cities and towns between performances they were always followed by a crowd of squalid children, nearly all of whom asked for American money. This constant begging greatly disgusted Freckles, who had been brought up with much of the New England thrift.

It was while playing in the great city of Buenos Aires that an accident befell Sir Wilton that changed the lives of both the Shetland and his driver, although its far-reaching scope did not at first appear.

Perhaps the most popular of the small horse's stunts was his trapeze act. The trapeze was a platform about six feet long and three feet wide. He ascended it by a set of steps, which were afterwards removed. When he was in position on the trapeze Freckles would start it swinging gently. This movement the Shetland would accelerate by swaying his body and shifting his weight from his hind legs to his fore legs. When the trapeze was

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swinging sufficiently, the pony would make the spring to a standard or pedestal which was about three feet away. Then he would turn about and make a bow to the audience and make ready for the spring back. Again some one had to set the trapeze swinging until it would swing close enough to the standard for the return jump.

Although the trick was seemingly perfectly safe, and Sir Wilton had made it several hundred times since coming into the circus life, and also in England, yet he misjudged the distance for once and came to grief. No one knew how it happened. Perhaps something in the audience distracted his attention. The only thing they knew was that it happened.

Instead of waiting until the trapeze had swung to the end of its arc, and then springing as it receded, Dapples jumped too quickly, and his fore-leg was caught between the swinging trapeze and the edge of the standard, and broken.

Freckles was by his side in a moment, trembling with fear and excitement.

Half a dozen circus hands were at once called. The favorite of the children had to be carried bodily from the ring, while Spanish children wept at the sight.

The veterinary, who always travels with the circus, inspected Sir Wilton's injury and then shook his head. To poor Freckles this shake of the head meant disaster. His first thought was that Dapples would have to be shot. But the veterinary, seeing his pale face, hastened to reassure him.

"Oh, no, son; it isn't as bad as that. We can mend him, but it will take a long time. He will have to be slung up for several weeks, and the leg will have to be in splints and perhaps a plaster cast. It means no more showing for you two for the rest of this South American trip. If there is a mix-up, you two seem to get into it."

Freckles hung upon the veterinarian's every movement as he arranged a swing

for the small horse. They finally made a portable frame for the swing, so that Dapples could be shipped in it when the time should come.

After spending the better part of the night over Sir Wilton, the veterinary said good-bye to him and to Freckles, and started after the circus, which had already departed.

So, for the second time, the chums were left behind, while the circus rattled on its way.

Freckles spent most of his time with Sir Wilton, talking to him, or reading quietly in the shade of a large tree which stood near the stable. Freckles himself boarded at a hotel, but he had little heart to explore the town. He and Dapples had explored so many cities together that it seemed wrong for him to go alone as long as his little horse friend could not go. Thus a tedious month dragged by.

Although it was winter, yet Freckles thought it very hot. He did not much

like the South American cities, because they were not clean, and also because he could not understand Spanish.

One day, when he had become discouraged with his and Dapples's lot, and wondered how much longer they would be kept there, he received a telegram from Mr. Bingham, requesting him to come to the city where they were to show the next day. The telegram concluded, "I have a proposition to make to you. Come at once."

Little dreaming of the surprise the circus owner had in store for Sir Wilton and himself, Freckles went, and it was from Mr. Bingham's lips that he heard the proposal that changed all the rest of Dapples's life, and his own as well.

CHAPTER XI

NORTHWARD BOUND

THE good ship *Rio de Janeiro* was ploughing her way vigorously through the blue Caribbean. A brisk wind on her stern was making the swell in her wake even more pronounced. It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining gloriously, and a myriad of sparkling diamonds and rainbow shapes trailed in the wake of the ship. The sky was perfect, and the whole scene seemed to Freckles to express gladness, as he sat on the hurricane deck reading an interesting book which Mr. Bingham had given him.

The *Rio de Janeiro* was not a circus ship, but a cattle boat. On her lower decks were nearly two thousand head of beef cattle on their way to the great markets of the United States. Just at pres-

ent they were rather still, but at certain times of day, especially at morning and evening, their bellowing came up to the hurricane deck in an almost constant sound.

The fresh wind kept the smell of bilgewater away from the upper decks. Although the ship was a cattle boat, yet she carried about fifty passengers. She was equipped with a generous set of well-appointed cabins and a dining-saloon and all the other comforts. This was to accommodate South American merchants, who wished to make trips to the United States between the sailing times of the regular passenger boats.

Freckles looked very happy as he sat on the deck reading his book, but his mind did not seem to be wholly on what he was reading, for he occasionally smiled and looked as though he was journeying in dreamland, as indeed he was.

He was going back home, and without the rest of the circus, all of which had

come about because of his trip to see Mr. Bingham in answer to that gentleman's urgent telegram. Freckles had really gone to that interview with considerable foreboding. What did Mr. Bingham want of him? So many things had happened to himself and Dapples since they had been with the circus that he was almost afraid. Mr. Bingham had always been very good, but perhaps he thought him a hoodoo and was going to fire him, and give his job of showing Sir Wilton to another boy who was more fortunate.

Such thoughts as these were racing wildly through Freckles's mind when he at last appeared at Mr. Bingham's office, which was nothing more than a small tent on the circus lot. Mr. Bingham greeted him cordially, but then he had always been cordial.

"Well, my boy, how are you?" asked the magnate, after he had finished looking over some papers upon which he was engaged.

“Fine!” returned Freckles.

“And the little horse?”

“He is fine also, but he is still in the sling. Sometimes I am afraid his leg will never mend.”

“Oh, yes, it will,” returned the circus owner confidently; “but I am afraid myself it will take some time. That was why I sent for you.”

Here Freckles’s heart began to pound so vigorously that he was afraid Mr. Bingham would hear it. Mr. Bingham’s next words confirmed his worst fears, and actually made him turn pale and his hands tremble.

“I have been thinking,” said Mr. Bingham reflectively, “that perhaps you ought to retire from the circus. You seem to be rather unlucky.”

It was just as he had imagined. Mr. Bingham thought him a hoodoo. He was going to fire him and give his job of driving Sir Wilton to a luckier boy. The thing that he loved the most of anything

in the whole world was to be taken away from him. Tears filled his eyes.

“ Oh, Mr. Bingham, Mr. Bingham,” he almost sobbed. “ Don’t fire me. I know I have been unlucky, but I am sure we will have better luck in the future. Sir Wilton is the only thing that I have in the whole world, and I haven’t really got him, but I can’t bear to leave him. I will work for less money, I will work for nothing, if you will only let me stay with him.”

Mr. Bingham had reached over and clasped Freckles’s hand warmly.

“ Don’t worry, boy. I haven’t any notion of parting you and Sir Wilton, not an idea of it. I was just thinking of something else.”

At this announcement Freckles’s heart gave a great bound of gladness. So he was not to lose Sir Wilton. Perhaps it would be a pleasant trip to see Mr. Bingham after all.

“ I have been thinking,” said Mr. Bingham. Then he stopped and looked hard

at Freckles, and a merry twinkle came into his eye.

“ I have been thinking,” continued Mr. Bingham, “ that you and Sir Wilton have earned me a good deal of money in the past year and a half—probably much more than I paid for him originally. You have been faithful, and you love him. Both Mr. Williams and Big Bill say they never saw such a love between a boy and a pony.”

“ Yes,” interrupted Freckles, “ I think as much of him as though he was my brother, and he loves me more than any one else in the world. Him and me is pals, Mr. Bingham.”

“ Yes, I see,” said Mr. Bingham reflectively. He took up a cigar and bit off the end of it and lighted it. “ Yes, I see,” he said.

Freckles waited in breathless suspense for his next words.

“ What I have been thinking is this,” continued Mr. Bingham. “ This last ac-

cident may give Sir Wilton a crooked fore-leg. It will not hurt him at all for a phaeton or saddle pony, but it rather takes the gilt off him for the ring, so I have been thinking that perhaps I ought to retire both you and him—put you out to pasture, so to speak.”

“What, him and me not to show any more?” cried Freckles, his fears returning in spite of himself.

“Yes, something of the sort,” returned the owner deliberately.

Freckles had braced himself for what Mr. Bingham might have to say next, but, even so, he had not been prepared for the manager’s proposition, which left him speechless and finally sent him sobbing into the manager’s arms.

“Well,” said Mr. Bingham, “I have decided, since you and Dapples think so much of each other, to give him to you and to send you both home to the United States. I think that would be a better life for you anyway. What do you say, boy?”

For several seconds Freckles sat staring at the circus magnate, fearing that he had not heard aright; but by degrees the meaning of Mr. Bingham's words sank into his dazed mind. With the impulse of boyhood he fell upon his knees before the astonished Mr. Bingham and, burying his face in the manager's lap, began crying for joy.

"God bless my soul!" cried the astonished man. "Why, why, boy, I didn't think you cared so much as this, or I would have sprung it on you by degrees. I was really sort of working up to it, too. Didn't you smell a rat? Didn't you know what I was driving at?"

"Oh, no, no; I never dreamed of anything so beautiful and wonderful in my whole life. Why, Mr. Bingham, I have been praying to God every night that I might earn money enough to some day buy him. I have been saving up every cent for a year. Why, I haven't bought an ice-cream for months."

“Been a-saving up for that very purpose, have you? Well, you won’t have to save up any more. Perhaps God heard your prayers and made me give him to you, or perhaps your Uncle Bingham heard about the horse fund. Well, it doesn’t matter,” he continued, rubbing his fat hands together happily. “The little horse is yours from this minute. Not only that, but I have engaged passage on the *Rio de Janeiro* for both you and Sir Wilton in two weeks. I am going to send you back right. I shall pay the passage money myself, and I am going to set you two up in business in the United States. Trust me to do a thing right when I do it at all.”

Freckles had tried to thank Mr. Bingham, but it seemed to him now, as he sat on the hurricane deck of the steamer which was ploughing her way rapidly toward home, that his words had been all insufficient. He had stammered and blubbered and made a sorry mess of it, but he felt

in some way that Mr. Bingham understood.

At this point in his reflections he closed his book, which he had not really been reading, and went down on to the second deck to see Sir Wilton and to tell him all about their plans once more. He had rehearsed them every day since they had sailed, but he got a great comfort from telling the Shetland over and over of how happy they were going to be, and of the wonderful life ahead.

He found Dapples in a nice small box-stall which had been fitted up especially for him. He was well bedded and had every comfort of a home stable. It was good to see him so finely provided for.

“Hello, little horse. Hello, Dapples,” cried Freckles, putting his arm over the Shetland’s neck and laying his face close to that of his pal. “We are going home, Dapples. Home, home, home, home. I have never had a home before, but I am going to have one now. We will both

have a fine home, and we will be the happiest folks in the whole world."

Freckles always thought of Dapples as folks.

"Mr. Bingham has done everything for us. All we have got to do is just to work a little and enjoy ourselves all the rest of our lives."

At this point in the confidence Sir Wilton bethought him of sugar, and, thrusting his nose into Freckles's pocket, obtained the coveted lump.

"Dapples, our home is going to be in a little town in the Adirondacks where Mr. Bingham lived when he was a boy. Every one knows Mr. Bingham there. When they know he is our friend they will be mighty good to us. He says so."

Dapples nodded his head in assent. This was the way he always said Yes in the ring.

"Mr. Bingham's friend, Mr. Ellery, keeps a store and hotel in the town. He brings the mail from the depot to the town

three times a day. He also brings passengers up to the town each day. You and I, Dapples, are going to live with him, and we are going to carry the mail and passengers, when there are any. Also perhaps we will deliver some groceries when they are rushed. It won't be hard work, Dapples, and I know you will like it."

Sir Wilton again nodded his head in assent.

"You dear little chum. How you always seem to understand everything that I say to you. You are the wisest horse in the whole world."

Here Dapples again nodded in assent, and this made Freckles laugh at his expense.

In some strange psychological way the Shetland knew that Freckles was laughing at him, so he put down his head and looked very sheepish. But Freckles brought the pony's face close to his own again, and concluded the interview.

"There is one thing, Dapples, that you

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may depend on. We will always stick together. No matter how many other horses I may have, I shall never love any of them like you. And no matter how much money I am offered for you, I will never sell you. We belong to each other forever."

At this assurance Dapples again nodded his head sagely. It was a pact agreed to by both parties—they were to belong to each other forever.

THE END

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