Otis James

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Mr. Stubbs's Brother A Sequel to 'Toby Tyler':

Содержание

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Chapter I
THE SCHEME

"Why, we could start a circus jest as easy as a wink, Toby, 'cause you know all about one an' all you'd have to do would be to tell us fellers what to do, an' we'd 'tend to the rest."

"Yes; but you see we hain't got a tent, or bosses, or wagons, or nothin', an' I don't see how you could get a circus up that way;" and the speaker hugged his knees as he rocked himself to and fro in a musing way on the rather sharp point of a large rock, on which he had seated himself in order to hear what his companions had to say that was so important.

"Will you come down with me to Bob Atwood's, an' see what he says about it?"

"Yes, I'll do that if you'll come out afterwards for a game of I-spy 'round the meetin'-house."

"All right; if we can find enough of the other fellers, I will."

Then the boys slipped down from the rocks, found the cows,

and drove them home as the preface to their visit to Bob Atwood's.

The boy who was so anxious to start a circus was a little fellow with such a wonderful amount of remarkably red hair that he was seldom called anything but Reddy, although his name was known – by his parents, at least – to be Walter Grant. His companion was Toby Tyler, a boy who, a year before, had thought it would be a very pleasant thing to run away from his Uncle Daniel and the town of Guilford in order to be with a circus, and who, in ten weeks, was only too glad to run back home as rapidly as possible.

During the first few months of his return, very many brilliant offers had been made Toby by his companions to induce him to aid them in starting an amateur circus; but he had refused to have anything to do with the schemes, and for several reasons. During the ten weeks he had been away, he had seen quite as much of a circus life as he cared to see, without even such a mild dose as would be this amateur show; and, again, whenever he thought of the matter, the remembrance of the death of his monkey, Mr. Stubbs, would come upon him so vividly, and cause him so much sorrow, that he resolutely put the matter from his mind.

Now, however, it had been a year since the monkey was killed; school had closed during the summer season; and he was rather more disposed to listen to the requests of his friends.

On this particular night, Reddy Grant had offered to go with him for the cows – an act of generosity which Toby accounted for only on the theory that Reddy wanted some of the strawberries

which grew so plentifully in Uncle Daniel's pasture. But when they arrived there the strawberries were neglected for the circus question, and Toby then showed he was at least willing to talk about it.

There was no doubt that Bob Atwood knew Reddy was going to try to induce Toby to help start a circus, and Bob knew, also, that Reddy and Toby would visit him, although he appeared very much surprised when he saw them coming up the hill towards his house. He was at home, evidently waiting for something, at an hour when all the other boys were out playing; and that, in itself, would have made Toby suspicious if he had paid much attention to the matter.

Bob was perfectly willing to talk about a circus – so willing that, almost before Toby was aware of it, he was laying plans with the others for such a show as could be given with the material at hand.

"You see we'd have to get a tent the first thing," said Toby, as he seated himself on the saw-horse as a sort of place of honor, and proceeded to give his companions the benefit of his experience in the circus line. "I s'pose we could get along without a fat woman, or a skeleton; but we'd have to have the tent anyway, so's folks couldn't look right in an' see the show for nothin'."

Reddy had decided some time before how that trifling matter could be arranged; and, as he went industriously to work making shavings out of a portion of a shingle, he said:

"I've got all that settled, Toby; an' when you say you're willin'

to go ahead an' fix up the show, I'll be on hand with a tent that'll make your eyes stick out over a foot."

Bob nodded his head to show he was convinced Reddy could do just as he had promised; but Toby was anxious for more particulars, and insisted on knowing where this very necessary portion of a circus was coming from.

"You see a tent is a big thing," he said seriously; "an' it would cost more money than the fellers in this town could raise if they should pick all the strawberries in Uncle Dan'l's pasture."

"Oh, I don't say as the tent Reddy's got his eye on is a reg'lar one like a real circus has," said Bob slowly and candidly, as he began to draw on the side of the wood-shed a picture of what he probably intended should represent a horse; "but he knows how he can rig one up that'll be big enough, an' look stavin'."

With this information Toby was obliged to be satisfied; and with the view of learning more of the details, in case his companions had arranged for them, he asked:

"Where you goin' to get the company – the folks that ride, an' turn hand-springs, an' all them things?"

"Ben Cushing can turn twice as many hand-springs as any feller you ever saw, an' he can walk on his hands twice round the engine-house. I guess you couldn't find many circuses that could beat him, an' he's been practising in his barn all the chance he could get for more'n a week."

Without intending to do so, Bob had thus let the secret out that the scheme had already been talked up before Toby

was consulted, and then there was no longer any reason for concealment.

"You see we thought we'd kinder get things fixed," said Reddy quickly, anxious to explain away the seeming deception he had been guilty of, "an' we wouldn't say anything to you till we knew whether we could get one up or not."

"An' we're goin' to ask three cents to come in; an' lots of the fellers have promised to buy tickets if we'll let 'em do some of the ridin', or else lead the hosses."

"But how are you goin' to get any hosses?" asked Toby, thoroughly surprised at the way in which the scheme had already been developed.

"Reddy can get Jack Douglass's blind one, an' we can train him so's he'll go 'round the ring all right; an' your Uncle Dan'l will let you have his old white one that's lame, if you ask him. I ain't sure but I can get one of Chandler Merrill's ponies," continued Bob, now so excited by his subject that he left his picture while it was yet a three-legged horse, and stood in front of his friends; "an' if we could sell tickets enough, we could hire one of Rube Rowe's hosses for you to ride."

"An' Bob's goin' to be the clown, an' his mother's goin' to make him a suit of clothes out of one of his grandmother's curtains," added Reddy, as he snapped an imaginary whip with so many unnecessary flourishes that he tumbled over the saw-horse, thereby mixing a large quantity of sawdust in his brilliantly colored hair.

"An' Reddy's goin' to be ring-master," explained Bob, as he assisted his friend to rise, and acted the part of Good Samaritan by trying to get the sawdust from his hair with a curry-comb. "Joe Robinson says he'll sell tickets, an' 'tend the door, an' hold the hoops for you to jump through."

"Leander Leighton's goin' to be the band. He's got a pair of clappers; an' Mrs. Doak's goin' to show him how to play on the accordion with one finger, so's he'll know how to make an awful lot of noise," said Reddy, as he gave up the task of extracting the sawdust, and devoted his entire attention to the scheme.

"An' we can have some animals," said Bob, with the air of one who adds the crowning glory to some brilliant work.

Toby had been surprised at the resources of the town for a circus, of which he had not even dreamed; and at Bob's last remark he left his saw-horse seat as if to enable him to hear more distinctly.

"Yes," continued Bob, "we can get a good many of some kinds. Old Mrs. Simpson has got a three-legged cat with four kittens, an' Ben Cushing has got a hen that crows; an' we can take my calf for a grizzly bear, an' Jack Havener's two lambs for white bears. I've caught six mice, an' I'll have more'n a dozen before the show comes off; an' Reddy's goin' to bring his cat that ain't got any tail. Leander Leighton's goin' to bring four of his rabbits an' make believe they're wolves; an' Joe Robinson's goin' to catch all the squirrels he can – we'll have the largest for foxes, an' the smallest for hyenas; an' Joe'll keep howlin' while he's tendin' the

door, so's to make 'em sound right."

"Bob's sister's goin' to show him how to sing a couple of songs, an' he's goin' to write 'em out on paper so's to have a book to sell," added Reddy, delighted at the surprise expressed in Toby's face. "Nahum Baker says if we have any kind of a show he'll bring up some lemonade an' some pies to sell, an' pass 'em 'round jest as they do in a reg'lar circus."

This last information was indeed surprising, for, inasmuch as Nahum Baker was a man who had an apology for a fruit-store near the wharves, it lent an air of realism to the plan, this having a grown man connected with them in the enterprise.

"But he mustn't get any of the boys to help him, an' then treat them as Job Lord did me," said Toby earnestly, the scheme having grown so in the half-hour that he began to fear it might be too much like the circus with which he had spent ten of the longest and most dreary weeks he had ever known.

"I'll look out for that," said Bob confidently, "If he tries any of them games we'll make him leave, no matter how good a trade he's doin'."

"Now, where we goin' to have the show?" and from the way Toby asked the question it was easily seen that he had decided to accept the position of manager which had been so delicately offered him.

"That's jest what we ain't fixed about," said Bob, as if he blamed himself severely for not having already attended to this portion of the business. "You see, if your Uncle Dan'l would let

us have it up by his barn that would be jest the place, an' I almost know he'd say yes if you asked him."

"Do you s'pose it would be big enough? You know when there's a circus in town everybody comes from all around to see it, an' it wouldn't do to have a place where they couldn't all get in," and Toby spoke as if there could be no doubt as to the crowds that would collect to see this wonderful show of theirs.

"It'll have to be big enough, if we use the tent I'm goin' to get," said Reddy decidedly; "for you see that won't be so awful large, an' it would make it look kinder small if we put it where the other circuses put theirs."

"Well, then, I s'pose we'll have to make that do, an' we can have two or three shows if there are too many to come in at one time," said Toby in a satisfied way that matters could be arranged so easily; and then, with a big sigh, he added, "If only Mr. Stubbs hadn't got killed, what a show we could have! I never saw him ride; but I know he could have done better than any one else that ever tried it, if he wanted to, an' if we had him we could have a reg'lar circus without anybody else."

Then the boys bewailed the untimely fate of Mr. Stubbs, until they saw that Toby was fast getting into a mood altogether too sad for the proper transaction of circus business, and Bob proposed that a visit be paid Ben Cushing, for the purpose of having him give them a private exhibition of his skill, in order that Toby might see some of the talent which was to help make their circus a glorious success.

Chapter II
THE BLIND HORSE

Reddy had laid his plans so well that all the intending partners were where they could easily be found on this evening when Toby's consent was to be won, and Ben Cushing was no exception. On the hard, uneven floor of his father's barn, with all his clothes discarded save his trousers and shirt, he was making such heroic efforts in the way of practice, that while the boys were yet some distance from the building they could hear the thud of Ben's head or heels as he unexpectedly came in contact with the floor.

When the three visitors stood at the door and looked in, Ben professed to be unaware of their presence, and began a series of hand-springs that might have been wonderful, if he had not miscalculated the distance, and struck the side of the barn just as he was getting well into the work.

Then, having lost his opportunity of dazzling them by showing that even when he was alone he could turn any number of hand-springs simply in the way of exercise, he suddenly became aware of their presence, and greeted his friends with the anxiously asked question as to what Toby had decided to do about entering the circus business.

Bob and Reddy, instead of answering, waited for Toby to

speak; it was a good opportunity to have the important matter settled definitely, and they listened anxiously for his decision.

"I'm goin' into it," said Toby after a pause, during which it appeared as if he were trying to make up his mind, "'cause it seems as if you had it almost done now. You know when I got home last summer I didn't ever want to hear of a circus or see one, for I'd had about enough of them, an' then I'd think of poor Mr. Stubbs, an' that would make me feel awful bad. I didn't think, either, that we could get up such a good show; but now you fellers have got so much done towards it, I think we'd better go ahead – though I do wish Mr. Stubbs was alive, an' we had a skeleton an' a fat woman."

Reddy Grant cheered very loudly as a means of showing how delighted he was at thus having finally enlisted Toby in the scheme, and Bob, as proof of the high esteem in which all the projectors of the enterprise held this famous circus-rider, said:

"Now you know all about circuses, Toby, an' you shall be the chief boss of this one, an' we'll do just what you say."

Toby almost blushed as this great honor was actually thrust upon him, and he hardly knew what reply to make, when Ben ceased his acrobatic exercises, and, with Bobby and Reddy, stood waiting for him to give his orders.

"I s'pose the first thing to do," he said at length, "is to see if Jack Douglass is willin' for us to have his hoss, an' then find out what Uncle Dan'l says about it. If we don't get the hoss, it won't be any use to say anything to Uncle Dan'l."

Reddy was so anxious to have matters settled at once that he offered to go up to Mr. Douglass's house then, if the others would wait there for his return, which proposition was at once accepted.

Mr. Douglass was an old colored man who lived fully half a mile from the village; but Reddy's eagerness caused quick travelling, and in a surprisingly short time he was back breathless and happy. The coveted horse was to be theirs for as long a time as they wanted him, provided they fed him well, and did not attempt to harness him into a wagon.

The owner of the sightless animal had expressed his doubts as to whether he would ever make much of a circus-horse, owing to his lack of sight and his extreme age; but he argued that if, as was very probable, the animal fell while being ridden, he would hurt his rider quite as much as himself, and therefore the experiment would not be tried so often as seriously to injure the steed.

It only remained to consult Uncle Daniel on the matter, and of course that was to be attended to by Toby. He would have waited until a fitting opportunity presented itself; but his companions insisted so strongly, that he went home at once to have the case decided.

Uncle Daniel was seated by the window as usual, looking out over the distant hills as if he were trying to peer in at the gates of that city where so many loved ones awaited him, and it was some moments before Toby could make him understand what it was he was trying to say.

"So ye didn't get circusin' enough last summer?" asked the

old gentleman, when at last he realized what it was the boy was talking about.

"Oh yes, I did!" replied Toby, quickly; "but you see that was a real one, an' this of ours is only a little make-believe for three cents. We want to get you to let us have the lot between the barn an' the road to put our tent on, an' then lend us old Whitey. We're goin' to have Jack Douglass's hoss that's blind, an' we've got a three-legged cat, an' one without any tail, an' lots of things."

"It's a kind of a cripples' circus, eh? Well, Toby boy, you can do as you want to, an' you shall have old Whitey; but it seems to me you'd better tie her lame leg on, or she'll shake it off when you get to makin' her cut up antics."

Then Uncle Daniel returned to his reverie, and the show was thus decided upon, the projectors going again to view the triangular piece of land so soon to be decorated with their tents and circus belongings.

Each hour that passed after Toby had decided, with Uncle Daniel's consent, to go into the circus business made him more eager to carry out the brilliant plan that had been unfolded by Bob Atwood and Reddy Grant, until his brain was in a perfect whirl when he went to bed that night. He was sure he could ride as well as when he was under Mr. Castle's rather severe training, and he thought over and over again how he would surprise every one who knew him; but he did not stop to think that there might be a difference between the horse he had ridden in the circus and the lame one of Uncle Daniel's, or the blind one belonging to

Mr. Douglass. He had an idea that it all depended upon himself, with very little reference to the animal, and he was sure he had his lesson perfectly.

Early as he got up the next morning, his partners in the enterprise were waiting for him just around the corner of the barn, where he found them as he went for the cows, and they walked to the pasture with him in order to discuss the matter.

Ben Cushing was in light-marching and acrobatic costume, worn for the occasion in order to give a full exhibition of his skill; and Reddy had been up so long that he had had time to procure Mr. Douglass's wonderful steed, which he had already led to the pasture so that he could be experimented upon.

"I thought I'd get him up there," he said to Toby, "so's you could try him; 'cause if we don't get money enough to hire one of Rube Rowe, you'll have to ride the blind one or the lame one, an' you'd better find out which you want. If you try him in the pasture the fellers won't see you; but if you did it down by your house, every one of 'em would huddle 'round."

Toby thought the general idea was a good one; but he was just a trifle uncertain as to how the blind horse would get along on such uneven ground. However, he said nothing, lest his companions should think he was afraid to make the attempt; and when Ben and Bob proceeded to mark out a ring, he advised them as to its size.

The most level piece of ground that could be found was selected as the place for the trial, but several small mounds

prevented it from being all a circus-rider could ask for.

Bob volunteered to lead the horse around the track several times, hoping he would become so accustomed to it as to be able to go by himself after a while; and Toby made his preparations by laying his hat on the ground with a stone on it, so that he should be sure to find it when his rehearsal was done.

It was a warm job Bob had undertaken, this leading the blind animal along the ill-defined line that marked the limits of the ring, for the sun shone brightly, and there were no friendly trees to lend a shelter; but he paid no attention to his discomfort because of the fact that he was doing something towards the enterprise which was to bring them in both honor and money.

The poor old horse was the least interested of the party, and he stumbled around the circle in an abused sort of way, as if he considered it a piece of gross injustice to force him on the weary round when the grass was so plentiful and tender just under his feet.

Ben was busily engaged in lengthening Mr. Douglass's rather weak and aged bridle with a small piece of rope, and from time to time he encouraged the ambitious clown in his labor.

"Keep it up, if it is hot!" he shouted; "an' when we get him so's he can do it alone, he'll be jest as good a circus-hoss as anybody would want, for we can stuff him with hay an' grass till he's fat," and Ben looked at the clearly defined ribs in a critical way, as if trying to decide how much food would be necessary to cover them with flesh.

"Oh, I can keep on as long as the hoss can," said Bob, as he wiped the perspiration from his face with one hand, and clung firmly to the forelock of the animal with the other; "but we've been round here as many as six times already, an' he don't seem to know the way any better than when we started."

"Oh yes, he does," cried Reddy, who was practising for his duties as ring-master, anxious that his education should advance as fast as the horse's did; "he's got so he knows enough to turn out for that second knoll, though he does stumble a little over the first one."

By this time Ben had the bridle adjusted to suit him, Toby was ready to make his first attempt at riding since he left the circus, and the more serious work was begun.

Ben bridled the horse after some difficulty, Reddy drew out from its hiding-place a whip made by tying a piece of cod-line to an alder branch, and Toby was about to mount, when Joe Robinson came in sight.

He had been running at full speed, and was nearly breathless; but he managed to cry out so that he could be understood after considerable difficulty:

"Hold on! don't go to ridin' till after we get some hoops for you to jump through."

"I guess I won't try any jumpin' till after I see how he goes," said Toby as he looked rather doubtfully first at the horse's weak legs, and then at his sharp back; "besides, we can't use the hoops till he gets more used to the ring."

Joe threw himself on the ground as if he felt quite as much aggrieved because he was thus left out of the programme as the horse apparently did because he was in it, and Bob consoled him by explaining that he had no reason to feel slighted, since he, who, as the clown, was to be the life of the entertainment, could take no other part in these preparatory steps than to lead a blind horse around a still blinder ring.

"Hold him while I get on," said Toby as he clutched the mane and a portion of the prominent backbone, drawing himself up at some risk of upsetting the rather shaky steed.

But there was no necessity of his giving this order, for, although four boys sprang to do his bidding, the weary horse remained as motionless as a statue, save for his hard breathing which proclaimed the fact that the "heaves" had long since singled him out as a victim.

Toby succeeded in getting on the animal's back after some exertion; but he found standing there an entirely different matter from standing on the broad saddles that were used in the circus, and the boy and the horse made a shaky-looking pair.

"Shall I start him?" asked Bob, while Reddy stood as near the centre of the ring as he could get, prepared to snap his cod-line whip at the first signal.

Toby hesitated a moment; he knew that to attempt to stand upon, or on either side of, that prominent backbone, after its owner was in motion, would be simply to invite his own downfall; and he said, as he seated himself carefully astride the bone:

"Let him walk around once till I see how he goes."

Reddy cracked his whip without producing any effect upon the patient steed, but, after much coaxing, Bob succeeded in starting him again, while Toby bounced up and down much like a kernel of corn on a griddle, such a decided motion did the horse have.

"He won't ever do for a ridin' hoss," said Toby with much difficulty, when he was half-way around the circle, "'cause you see his bones is so sharp that he feels as if he was comin' to pieces every time he steps."

"Jest get him to trottin' once, an' then you can tell what he's good for," suggested Reddy, anxious to try the effect of his whip; and, without waiting for the rider's permission, he lashed the unfortunate animal with the cod-line until he succeeded in rousing him thoroughly.

It was in vain Toby begged him to stop, and Bob shouted that such a course was not the proper one for a ring-master to pursue. Reddy was determined the rider should have an opportunity of trying the horse under full speed, and the result was that the animal broke loose from Bob's guiding hand, rushing out of the imaginary ring into the centre of the pasture at a rate of speed that would have surprised and frightened Mr. Douglass had he been there to see it.

Shaken first up, then down, and from one side to the other, Toby stretched himself out at full length, clasping the horse around the neck as the patched bridle broke, and shouting

"Whoa!" at the full strength of his lungs.

After running fully fifty yards, until it seemed to Toby that his head and his body had been pounded into one, the horse stopped, leaned one heel up against the other, and stood as if dreamily asking whether they wanted any more circus out of him.

"Couldn't anybody ride him, he jolts so," said Toby to his partners, as they came running up to where he stood trying to find out whether or not his tongue was bleeding, and fearing it was, because his teeth had been pounded down on it so hard two or three times. "You see, in the circus they had big, wide saddles, an' the hosses didn't go anything like him."

"Well, we can fix a saddle," said Bob, thoughtfully; "but I don't know as we could do anything to the hoss."

"Perhaps old Whitey'll go better, 'cause she's lame," suggested Reddy, feeling that considerable credit was due him for having made it possible to test the animal's qualities in so short a time.

"I wouldn't wonder if this one would be all right when he gets a saddle on an' is trained," said Joe, and then he added, quickly, "I hain't got anything more to do to-day, an' I'll stay up here an' train him."

The partners were only too glad to accept this offer; and while Joe led the horse back to the supposed ring, Ben gave a partial exhibition of his acrobatic feats, omitting the most difficult, owing to the uneven surface of the land.

Then the partners retired to the shade of some alder bushes, where they could fight mosquitoes and talk over their plans at the

same time, while Joe was perspiring in his self-imposed task of educating the blind horse.

Chapter III
ABNER BOLTON

"Now I'll see about makin' the saddle," said Bob, "'cause I've seen 'em a good many times in a circus, an' I know jest how they're made. While I'm doin' that you fellers must be fixin' 'bout who else we'll have in the show. Leander Leighton will come up here to-morrow, so's we can hear how he plays, an' we must have everything fixed by then."

"Why didn't he come to-day?" asked Ben, thinking that all the members of the firm should have been present at this first rehearsal.

"Well, you see, he had to split some wood, an' he had to take care of the baby. I offered to help him with the wood; but he said he couldn't get away any quicker if I did, for just as soon as the baby saw another feller waitin' 'round, she'd yell so awful hard he'd have to stay in all day."

This explanation as to the absence of the band appeared to be perfectly satisfactory to those present, and they began to discuss the merits of certain of their companions in order to decide upon the proper ones to enlist as members, since the number of their performers was not so large as they thought it should be in a show where an admission fee of three cents was to be charged.

Just as they were getting well into their discussion, and, of

course, speaking of such matters as managers should keep a profound secret from the public, Bob cried out:

"There comes Abner Bolton! He's always runnin' 'round where he hain't wanted; an' I wonder how he come to know we was here? I'll send him off mighty quick now, you see."

The boy who had disturbed Bob so greatly was so near when he was first discovered that by the time the threat had been uttered he was close upon them. He was a small boy, not more than eight years old, and hardly as large as a boy of six should be; he walked on crutches because of his deformed legs, which hung withered and useless, barely capable of supporting his slight weight.

"Now, what do *you* want?" asked Bob, in an angry tone.

"I don't want anything," was the mild reply, as the cripple halted just outside the shade, as if not daring to come any farther until invited. "I heard you was goin' to get up a circus, an' I thought perhaps you'd let me watch you, 'cause I wouldn't bother you any."

"You would bother us, an' you can't stay 'round here, for we hain't goin' to have anybody watchin' us. You may come to the show if you can get three cents."

"I don't s'pose I could do that," said the boy, looking longingly towards the shade, but still standing in the sun. "I don't have any chance to get money, an' I do wish you boys would let me stay where you are, for it's so awful lonesome out to the poor-farm, an' I can't run around as you can."

"Well, you can't stay here, an' the sooner you go back to the village the better we'll like it, for we don't want anybody to know what we're talkin' about."

Toby had attempted to speak once or twice while Bob was engaged with the cripple from the poor-farm; but he did not get an opportunity until Abner turned to go away, looking thoroughly sad and disheartened.

"Don't go, Abner, but come and set down here where it's cool, an' perhaps we can fix it for you."

The cripple turned as Toby spoke, and the look which came into his face went right to the heart of the boy, who for ten long weeks had known what it was to be almost entirely without a friend.

"I don't see what you want him 'round here for," said Bob, petulantly, as Abner seated himself by Toby's side, thoroughly exhausted by his long walk. "He can't do nothin'; an' if he could, we don't want no fellers from the poor-farm mixed up with the show."

"It don't make any difference if he does live to the poor-farm," said Toby, as he put his little brown hand on Abner's thin fingers. "He has to stay there 'cause his father and mother's dead, an' perhaps I'd been there, 'cept for Uncle Dan'l. If I'd thought before about his bein' lonesome an' not bein' able to play like the rest of us, I'd gone out to see him; an' now we do know it we'll let him stay with us, an' perhaps he can do something in the circus."

"The fellers will laugh at us, an' say we're runnin' a poorhouse

show," replied Bob, sulkily.

"Well, let 'em laugh; we'll feel a good deal better'n they do, 'cause we'll know we're tryin' to let a little feller have some fun what don't get many chances;" and, in his excitement, Toby spoke so loudly that Joe came running up to see what was the matter.

"Let him stay 'round here to-day, 'cause we've got all through practisin', an' then tell him to keep away," said Ben, thinking this idea a very generous one.

"He can belong to the show jest as well as not; an' if you fellers will let him, I'll give you my part of all the money we make."

This proposition of Toby's put the matter on a very different basis, and both Ben and Bob now looked favorably inclined towards it.

"Don't you do that, Toby," said Abner, his eyes filling with tears because of the kindness shown him. "I'll go right away, an' I won't come into the village again to bother you."

"You shall come into the village every day, Abner, an' you won't bother us at all, for you shall go 'long of me everywhere I do, an' I won't never walk any faster'n you can;" and Toby moved his seat nearer Abner, to show that he took him under his especial care.

"He might help tend the door," said Joe, kindly, anxious to please Toby, "an' that'll give me a chance to do more howlin' for the hyenas, 'cause that'll be 'bout all I oughter do if I have to hold the hoops."

"Yes, he can do that," and Toby was very eager now, "an' we

can get him a stool to sit on, an' he can do jest as much as if he could stand up."

By this time Bob and Ben had decided that, in consideration of Toby's offer, Abner should be counted as one of the company, and the matters under discussion that had been interrupted by the cripple's coming were again taken up.

Owing to the possible chance that Joe could not succeed in training the blind horse sufficiently to make him useful in the ring, it was necessary to know just what animals they could procure, and Bob offered to see Chandler Merrill for the purpose of securing the services of his Mexican pony, who had never allowed any one to ride him without first having a severe battle.

"We can train him down all right," said Bob; "an' you fellers come down now while I find out 'bout the pony, so's we can come back here after dinner."

As it was very important that this matter should be settled as soon as possible, Bob's advice was acted upon; and as the boys started to go, Toby said:

"Come, Abner, you come home with me an' get some dinner, an' then you can come back here when I do."

Bob was disposed to make sport of this sudden friendship; but Toby paid no attention to what he said, and if any of them wanted to talk with him, they too were obliged to walk with the boy from the poor-farm.

By the time they arrived at Uncle Daniel's, Toby had formed many plans for making the life of the homeless boy more cheerful

than it ever had been.

Chapter IV
THE PONY

Toby's interest in the crippled boy whom he had taken under his charge was considerably greater than in the contemplated circus; and both Bob and Ben felt angry and injured when, in the midst of some brilliant plan for startling those of the good people of Guilford who should come to their circus, Toby would stop to say something to Abner, who was hobbling along as fast as possible in order that he might not oblige the party to wait for him.

For a number of years Toby had known that there was a crippled orphan at the poor-farm; but it so happened that he had not met him very often, and even then he had no idea of the lonely life the boy was obliged to lead.

On the way to the village he had formed several plans by which he might aid Abner; but none of them could be put into operation until after he had consulted Uncle Daniel and Aunt Olive.

It was nearly noon, and the understanding was that each one should get his dinner and go to the pasture again, when it would be known whether they were to be able to number Chandler Merrill's pony among the attractions of their show, or be wholly dependent upon the disabled horses that as yet made up their collection.

"You're comin' to get dinner with me, Abner," said Toby, as he stopped in front of Uncle Daniel's gate, while the little fellow was continuing on his way to the only place he could call home, there to get his dinner with the other paupers.

"I'm afraid your aunt won't want me," he said, shyly, while it was plain to be seen that he would be more than well pleased to accept the invitation.

"Aunt Olive won't care a bit, an' she'll be glad to have you, I know, 'cause she says it always does her good to see hungry people eat, though if that's so I must have done her an awful sight of good lots of times, for it don't seem to me I ever set down to the table in my life but what I was awful hungry. Come on now, so's we'll have time to get our hands an' faces washed before the dinner-bell rings."

Abner followed Toby in a hesitating way, much as if he expected each moment to be ordered back; and when they arrived at the door he stood on the threshold, not daring to enter until permission had been given.

"This is Abner Bolton, Uncle Dan'l," said Toby, as he saw that his newly made friend would not come in without an invitation from some one besides himself. "He lives out to the poor-farm, an' he don't have any such nice home as I've got, so I thought you wouldn't care if I brought him in to dinner."

"You've got a good heart, Toby, boy, and the Lord will reward you for it," said Uncle Daniel, as he stroked the boy's refractory hair; and then he said to Abner, "Come in, my lad, and share

Toby's dinner, nor need you ever hesitate about accepting any such invitation when it leads you here."

Then Aunt Olive greeted Abner so kindly that the poor boy hardly knew whether it was reality or a dream, so strange was it all to him.

During the dinner Toby told of the difficulty he had had in getting his partners to consent to Abner's being one of the company, and Aunt Olive, who had shown considerable interest in the circus scheme, said:

"Why don't you let him keep a stand, and then he can make some money for himself. I will bake him a lot of doughnuts and ginger-snaps, and your Uncle Dan'l will lend him money enough to buy lemons an' sugar. It will be a deal better than to have Nahum Baker there with his pies that are as heavy as lead, an' doughnuts that have soaked up all the fat in the pan."

Toby was delighted with the plan, and Abner's eyes glistened at the mere idea that it might be possible for him to do, once in his life at least, as did other and more fortunate boys.

It certainly seemed, when they arrived at the pasture again, as if everything was conspiring in favor of their circus, for Chandler Merrill had willingly consented to let them use his pony; but he had done so with the kindly prophecy that the little animal would "kick their brains out" if they were not careful with him.

In order to make sure that the consent would not be withdrawn, and at the same time to prove that he told the truth, Bob had brought the pony with him, and, judging from

his general appearance as he stood gazing suspiciously at the Douglass horse, he deserved all that was said of him regarding his vicious qualities. He was about half the size of an ordinary horse, and his coat was ragged-looking, owing to its having been rubbed off in spots, thus giving him the air of just such a pony as one would suppose willing to join a party of boys in starting a circus.

"Now, there's a hoss that hain't either lame or blind," said Bob, proudly, as he led the pony once around the ring to show his partners how he stepped. If he was intending to say anything more, he concluded to defer it while he made some very rapid movements in order to escape the blow the "hoss" aimed at him with his hind-feet.

"Kicks, don't he?" said Toby, in a tone which plainly told he did not think him very well suited to their purpose.

"Well, he did then," and Bob fastened the halter more securely by putting one end of the rope through the pony's mouth; "but you see that's 'cause he hain't been used much, an' he's tickled 'cause he's goin' to belong to a circus."

"How long before he'll get over bein' tickled?" asked Joe. "I'm willin' to train Jack Douglass's hoss; but I don't know 'bout this one till he gets sorry enough not to kick."

"Oh, he'll be all right jest as soon as Toby rides him 'round the ring a little while."

"Do you think I'm goin' to ride him?" asked Toby, beginning to believe his partners expected more of him than ever Mr. Castle

did.

"Of course; a feller what's been with a circus ought to know how to ride any hoss that ever lived," replied Bob, with considerable emphasis, owing to the fact that the pony kicked and plunged so that his words were jerked out of him, rather than spoken.

"I s'pose some fellers can; but I wasn't with the circus long enough to find out how to ride such hosses as them," and Toby retired to the shade of the alder bushes, where Abner was sitting to wait until Bob and the pony had come to terms.

It was quite as much as Bob could do to hold his prize, without trying to make any arrangements for having him ridden, and he called Reddy to help him.

Now, as the ring-master of the contemplated circus, Reddy ought to have known all about horses, and he thought he did until the pony made one plunge, just as he came up smiling with whip in hand. Then he said, as he ran towards Toby:

"I don't believe I want to be ring-master if we're goin' to have that hoss."

"Here, Joe, you help me," cried Bob, in desperation, growing each moment more afraid of the steed. "I want to get him up by the fence, where we can hitch him, till we find out what to do with him."

Joe was perfectly willing to assist the unfortunate clown in his troubles; but, as he started towards him, the pony wheeled and flung his heels out with a force that showed he would do some

damage if he could, and Joe also joined the party among the bushes.

Bob was thus left alone with his prize, and a most uncomfortable time he appeared to be having of it, standing there in the hot sun clinging desperately to the halter, and jumping from one side to the other when the pony attempted to bite, or strike him with his fore-feet.

"Let him go; he hain't any good," shouted Reddy from his secure retreat.

"If I let go the halter, he'll jump right at me," and there was a certain ring in Bob's voice that told he was afraid.

"Hitch him to the fence, an' then climb over," suggested Joe.

"But I can't get him over there, for he won't go a step," and Bob continued to hold fast to the halter, afraid to do so, but still more afraid to let go.

He had borrowed the pony; but it certainly seemed as if the animal had borrowed him, for his fear caused him to cling desperately to the halter as the only possible means of saving his life.

The boys under the alder bushes were fully alive to the fact that something should be done although they were undecided as to what that something should be.

Joe proposed that they all rush out and scare the pony away, but Bob insisted that he would be the sufferer by such a course. Reddy thought if Bob should show more spirit, and let the vicious little animal see that he was not afraid of him, everything would

be all right; but when it was proposed that he try the plan himself, he concluded, perhaps, there might be serious objections to such a course.

Ben thought if all of them got hold of the halter, they could pull the pony to the fence, and this plan was looked upon with such favor that it was adopted at once.

Every one, except Abner, took hold of the halter, after some little delay in getting there, owing to the readiness of the pony to use his heels at the slightest provocation; and, just when they were about to put forth all their strength in pulling, the pony jumped towards them suddenly, rendering their efforts useless, and starting all, save Bob, back to the alder bushes in ignominious flight.

Bob still remained at his post, or, more correctly speaking, the halter, and it was very much against his will that he did so.

"I wish Chandler Merrill would come up here an' get his old hoss, for I don't want him any longer," he said, angrily. "He ought to be prosecuted for lettin' us have such a old tiger."

Bob did not seem to remember that, if he had refused the loan of the pony, he would have considered Chandler Merrill very selfish; in fact, he hardly remembered anything save his own desire to get rid of the animal, and as quickly as possible.

"What shall I do?" he cried, in desperation. "I can't stand here all day, an' the hoss don't mean to let me get away."

"We've got to help Bob," said Toby, decidedly, as he arose to his feet again, and went towards the unfortunate clown. "If you

fellers will try to hold him, I'll get on his back, an' then Bob can get away."

"But he'll throw you off, an' hurt you," objected Abner, trying to prevent his newly made friend from going.

"I can stop him from doing that, an' it's the only way I know of to help Bob."

"You get on, Toby, an' then I'll scoot jest as soon as you get hold of the halter," said Bob, happy at this prospect of being relieved. "Then, when you get a chance, you jump off, an' we'll let somebody else take him home."

It was a hard task, and they all ran considerable risk of getting kicked; but at last it was accomplished, so far as mounting was concerned. Toby was on the pony's back with a firm grasp of the rope that was made to serve as bridle.

"Now, be all ready to run," he said; and there was no disposition to linger shown by any of his friends.

"Let go!" he shouted, and at the sound of his voice the boys went one way and the pony another at full speed.

It was not until the would-be circus managers were within the shelter of the clump of bushes that they stopped to look for their partner, and then they saw him at the further end of the pasture, the pony running and leaping as if doing his best to dislodge his rider.

Even the Douglass horse seemed to be excited by the display of spirit, for he capered around in a manner very unbecoming one as old and blind as he.

Only for a few moments could they watch the contest, and then the distant trees hid Toby Tyler and Chandler Merrill's pony from view.

Chapter V
OLD BEN

Some time the boys watched for Toby's return, and just as they were beginning to think they ought to go in search of him, and fearing lest he had been hurt by the vicious pony, they saw him coming from among the trees, alone and on foot.

"Well," said Bob, with a sigh of relief, "he's got rid of the hoss, an' that was all we wanted."

Toby's story, when at last, hot and tired, he reached the alder bushes, was not nearly so exciting as his partners anticipated. He had clung to the pony until they entered the woods, where he was brushed off by the branches of the trees as easily as if he had been a fly, and with as little damage.

How they should get the pony back into its owner's keeping was a question difficult to answer, and they were all so completely worn out by their exertions to get rid of him that they did not attempt to come to any conclusion regarding it.

While they were resting from their labors, and before they had ceased to congratulate each other that they had succeeded in separating themselves from the pony, Leander Leighton, his accordion under his arm and his clappers in his hand, made his appearance.

His struggle with the baby had evidently come to an end

sooner than he had dared hope, and the managers were happy at this speedy prospect of hearing what their band could do in the way of music.

"Boys!" shouted Leander, excitedly, while he was some distance away, "there's a real circus comin' here next week – the same one Toby Tyler run away with – an' the men are pastin' up the bills now, down to the village!"

The boys looked at each other in surprise; it had never entered into their calculations that they might have a real circus as a rival, and certainly Toby had never thought he would again see those whom he had first run away with and then run away from. He was rather disturbed by the prospect at first, for it seemed certain that Job Lord and Mr. Castle would try to compel him to go with them; but a moment's thought convinced him that Uncle Daniel would not allow them to carry him away, and he grew as eager for more news as any of the others.

Leander knew no more than he had already told; after having been relieved from his care of the baby, he had started for the pasture, and had seen the show-bills as he came along. He was certain it was the same circus Toby had gone with, for the names on the bills were the same, and he had heard some of the townspeople say so as he came along.

"An' I shall see the skeleton an' the fat woman again," said Toby, delighted at the idea of meeting those kind friends from whom he had thought himself parted with forever.

"Don't you s'pose you could get 'em to leave that show an'

come with ours?" asked Bob, thinking perhaps some kind fortune had thrown this opportunity in their way that they might the better succeed in their project.

Toby was not sure such a plan could be made to work, for the reason that they were only intending to give two or three performances, and Mr. and Mrs. Treat might not think it worth their while to leave the circus they were with on the strength of such uncertain prospects.

"And you shall go to the show, Abner," said Toby, pleased at the opportunity he would have of making the crippled boy happy for one day at least; "an' I'll take all of you fellers down, an' get the skeleton to talk at you, so's you can see how nice he is. You shall see his wife, an' old Ben, an' Ella, an' – "

"But won't you be afraid of Job Lord?" interrupted Leander, fearful lest Toby's dread of meeting his old employer might prevent them from having all this promised enjoyment.

"Uncle Dan'l wouldn't let him take me away, an' now I'm home here I don't believe old Ben would let him touch me."

There was evidently no probability that they would transact any more business relative to their own circus that day, so intent were they on talking about the one that was to come, and it was not until nearly time to drive the cows home that they remembered the presence of their band.

Ben proposed that Leander should show them what he could do in the way of music, so that he need not be at the trouble of bringing his accordion up into the pasture again, and the boys

ceased all conversation for the purpose of listening to the so-called melody.

After considerable preparation in the way of polishing his clappers on the cuff of his jacket and fingering the keys of his accordion to make sure they were in proper working order, Leander extracted with one finger a few bars of "Yankee Doodle" from the last-named instrument, and gave an imitation of a drum with the clappers, in a manner that won for him no small amount of applause.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.