

CHAPTER I -The circus boys on the flying Rings

Phil Forrest and Teddy Tucker, two inseparable friends with a shared yearning to join the circus, find themselves beneath the vibrant billboards of the Great Sparling Combined Shows. Phil, nearly seventeen, lives a life marked by hardship and loss, his parents having passed away five years prior, leaving him in the care of his miserly uncle. Despite these challenges, Phil's resolve to pursue an education and his dreams of circus stardom remains undimmed. Teddy, a year younger and equally determined, imagines himself as either a commanding ringmaster or a sprightly clown, his life having similarly been touched by loss, though he's been taken in by a kind family in Edmeston.

As they admire the circus poster, showcasing breathtaking stunts they wish to one day emulate, Teddy boasts of his ability to perform aerial cartwheels, only to be gently corrected by Phil that the stunt in question is, in fact, a double somersault. Their banter reveals deep aspirations: Phil dreams of high-flying acts that leave audiences in awe, while Teddy considers the immediate thrill of the circus life, undeterred by the daunting reality of their present circumstances.

Their conversation turns reflective as Phil laments his restricted childhood under his uncle's roof, his voice tinged with the sorrow of lost parental love yet steadied by respect for his mother's memory. The boys' starkly different backgrounds, marked by tragedy and tough love, bond them with a shared conviction towards brighter futures, ideally under the big top.

A plan to attend the upcoming circus show in Edmeston reveals their innocently divergent views on the ethics of sneaking into the circus, with Teddy pragmatic and

Phil principled, unwilling to compromise honesty for adventure. As they walk, their imaginations fueled by vibrant posters and the anticipation of the circus, they discuss the realities of their lives with candidness and youthful optimism. A daring attempt by Teddy to replicate the acrobatic feats advertised, resulting in a humorous yet somewhat perilous tumble into a ditch, encapsulates the fearless, albeit naive, spirit with which they approach their dreams and friendship.

The chapter closes with Phil assisting Teddy, their laughter and resilience shining through the mud-splattered aftermath of Teddy's impromptu stunt. Their unyielding friendship and dreams, set against the backdrop of the austere landscapes of their personal lives, craft a vivid tableau of hope, ambition, and the enchanting allure of the circus.

