

# CHAPTER XIII -The Circus Boys Across the Continent

**CHAPTER XIII - The Circus Boys Across the Continent** finds the Sparling Combined Shows thriving as they travel from town to town, thrilling crowds and drawing applause wherever they go. Amidst this success, trouble surfaces during a stop in Franklin, Indiana. Late one evening, Phil Forrest and Teddy Tucker are ambushed by two men hiding in the shadows near the circus grounds. Though the attackers catch them off guard, the boys manage to escape with only scrapes and bruises. They return to their duties the next day, bandaged and sore, choosing not to let the incident distract from their responsibilities. Their bruised appearances draw teasing remarks from fellow performers, yet neither boy shares the full story until Mr. Sparling presses them after noticing their injuries.

Upon learning the details, Mr. Sparling takes the matter seriously and quietly begins an internal inquiry. The boys describe their attackers clearly, leading to suspicions about two workers—Red Larry and a man known only as Bad Eye. These canvasmen had a reputation for being short-tempered and careless, but no one expected them to resort to violence. A quick inspection of lost clothing items—specifically a button and a torn collar—further supports the boys' account. Without causing public commotion, Sparling dismisses both men and warns them never to return. The decision, though necessary, is not without risk. Men like Larry don't often leave quietly.

That risk proves real when Larry tries to re-enter the grounds under the pretense of collecting his belongings. His presence is noticed near Emperor, one of the circus's elephants, just as the animal is being bathed. Larry's nervous, jerky movements around the elephant raise concern. Emperor, reacting as if he recognizes a former threat, charges suddenly and douses Larry with a strong blast of water from his trunk.

In the chaos, the animal's aggressive posture makes it clear that something deeper lies behind this reaction—possibly a memory of mistreatment. Phil, seeing the potential danger, rushes forward to calm Emperor, guiding him away before the situation turns tragic.

Soaked and humiliated, Larry lashes out, blaming Phil for turning the elephant against him. His accusations fall flat as witnesses quickly point out that Phil had not been near Emperor until after the soaking began. Mr. Sparling arrives in time to confront Larry, who flees the scene rather than face further questions or punishment. Though Sparling gives chase, the man vanishes before he can be caught. The brief chaos leaves the circus grounds buzzing with speculation and unease, though many performers find comfort in how swiftly Phil responded to the situation. It's another mark of his growing reliability and calm under pressure.

Later that evening, as the circus prepares for another show, Phil and Teddy quietly reflect on everything that has happened. The attack, the firing, and the elephant's reaction all point to a pattern they can't ignore. Trust, once broken, spreads uncertainty through the camp. They realize that while the circus may dazzle on stage, danger sometimes lurks where it's least expected. Still, their bond grows stronger with each shared challenge. They learn that loyalty in this environment is earned not just through performance, but through daily vigilance, standing up for others, and protecting what matters most.

The events also hint at deeper tensions within the traveling troupe. With each stop, the potential for both excitement and danger grows. Yet these moments also bring out the best in those who choose to stand firm when others run. Phil's bravery doesn't go unnoticed, nor does Teddy's unwavering support. Though young, they continue to prove that age is no barrier when it comes to courage and integrity. Their journey isn't just about acts and applause—it's about navigating loyalty, betrayal, and the unpredictable rhythm of life on the road.

As the lights flicker on and crowds begin to gather for the evening performance, the boys take their places, setting aside their personal trials to deliver yet another show.

Their smiles may be part of the act, but the strength behind them is real. This chapter reminds readers that while the circus is full of spectacle, its truest stories unfold away from the spotlight—where bonds are tested, character is shaped, and quiet acts of courage speak loudest.

