

Once, as the trainer raised his eyes to study the outline of the city, he saw that the assistant-manager, Carr, in boots and ulster, was galloping swiftly towards them. He reached Killeen, and both men slackened their pace until they were within easy hearing of Grayson and his charge.

'They've been here—Tuesday,' Carr was saying savagely. 'Cleaned out the whole town!'

'Hang them!' Killeen hurled back.

His face, as Grayson beheld it for an instant, was white with mingled rage and defeat. Vaguely, Grayson appreciated that some rival show had slipped in before them. He knew well enough what that meant. And, as if to cast a final damper on the gloomy prospect ahead, the rain began once more to pour from the pent-up heavens.

For just a moment, even Grayson pitied the despairing figure of the manager as he whipped up the collar of his coat.

'We're beaten, Carr—that and this weather!' Killeen's voice was almost a whine. 'I'll turn them back. We might as well sulk in the cars.'

He dug his heels into his horse, but Carr caught him doggedly by the coat.

'What's the use?' he demanded. 'They've got the canvas up. Give the animals a chance to stretch themselves. You might as well. As for—'

Their voices were lost to Grayson as they spurred a little ahead. The next he heard was from Killeen.

'Salaries! Salaries! Man, do you know I've little enough over the money to haul us out of here? We're done if the sun don't shine to-morrow!'

So it was that bad, Grayson reflected. He had known all along that they were scarcely making expenses. It was the old story of a poor outfit and worse luck. Salaries were already weeks behind. But now—to be stranded without a dollar, to have cast upon him the crippled elephant, with no time perhaps no chance, to hunt a new place.

The rain became a heavy mist, as if the skies were an immense, minutely-fine sieve under a deluge.

They were nearing the wet canvases when a little girl, wrapped in a pinned-up raincoat, ran out across the sodden field towards the men on horseback. It was Mary, the sweet, sunny-eyed, hisping little seven-year-old daughter of the manager; and, in her eagerness to reach her father, she darted through the long circus cavalcade to him, crossing heedlessly in front of the elephant and sinking ankle-deep in the thick mud directly in Rajah's path.

Grayson's hand shot out to guide the elephant aside, but he was an instant too late. Rajah, his film-covered eyes catching sight of the obstacle in his path, had lifted her gently in his trunk and swung her clear of his lumbering feet.

Killeen, hearing her little, startled cry, glanced up in time to comprehend the situation.

'Grayson!' he screamed. 'Grayson!' The trainer struck the elephant sharply with his prod, but Rajah had already deposited the tiny figure, unhurt, and was plodding laboriously on.

Killeen rode furiously up. 'Grayson, 'I've had enough of you and that worthless beast!' he stormed. All the bitterness, generated by the past weeks' disappointments, was loosened in his voice. 'You can clear out to-morrow—you and that elephant! Understand? I don't want to see you about after to-morrow night.'

Grayson lifted his dull, lethargic face. Now that the worst had come, he thought little of defence.

'Rajah didn't mean to hurt her,' he said dumbly.

'We won't argue that. I've done with you both. You can clear out!'

The trainer's muscles tightened tensely under his rough clothing.

'You'll give us our back pay?' he demanded doggedly, though he knew already the futility of asking.

The manager's eyes blazed. 'Pay?' he bellowed. 'You're lucky to get another meal for yourself and that hulk of worthless flesh.'

Grayson looked at him unflinchingly. 'D'you know, Killeen, that I ain't got a dollar in the world? I needed that money long before this. If you turn me an' Rajah out without a—'

'I can't help it! I can't help it! Heavens, man, sell him, and get him off your hands. He's useless. He's going blind. He'll be dangerous soon. You can't take care of him.' Killeen's sullen tone swelled suddenly with the flood of his recent adversities. 'You'll have to get out, anyway. I don't want to see you about this show after to-night!'

The hot words trembling on Grayson's lips seemed quenched by some inner struggle, already ended, in the man's soul. He turned his back on the manager, and strode uncaringly on.

The fight was over and done with—the fight that he and Rajah had waged together against the inevitable. He knew now that it had been over and done with when, all too late, he had found the elephant in that hissing burning wreck of the menagerie-car. All had been over as far as Killeen, or any other manager, was concerned, when Rajah's eyes began slowly to dim and weaken under the film whose presence and steady growth had meant surrender. Rajah had lost his own!

In the big, empty space in the far corner of the menagerie tent, Grayson himself drove the stake and buckled the chain about Rajah's sound hind foot. Despite the constant suffering and pain the accident had entailed, the elephant never made protest to the trainer's ministrations, though the other keeper's kept a respectful distance.

The rain was coming down steadily now. The canvases sagged more and more soddenly. Water trickled through tiny, unseen holes, and enveloped the centre poles in a fine, drifting spray.

Most of the circus hands had straggled back to the cars. There would be no afternoon performance. A group of keepers, huddled on a blanket in the driest part of the tent, cursed the weather and their luck. Grayson sat apart from them, over by the elephant. He did not seem to notice the wet.

One after another, they came to him making excuses—catarrh, sore-throat, rheumatism—all with the half-apologetic purpose of getting back to the cars. Yes, he would stay and keep an eye on things, he told them. They wondered at his dumb, apathetic nod, and went their way.

Grayson sat quietly on an old chest after they had gone, his head buried in his hard, horny hands, thinking. There seemed nothing to do—nothing to plan for. Ever since he could remember, he had known only this life. Even now, he might have shifted for himself in some other work—returned, perhaps, to the place he had filled in animal-training years ago—but for the helpless elephant, which in some mysterious manner, of which his blunt circus discipline could tell him little, he had come to love.

After awhile, he lifted his eyes with a sudden start of recollection. The elephant's great trunk was waving more and more restlessly back and forth. Grayson got slowly to his feet.

'I was thinkin' so hard about what was goin' to become of us, Rajah, that I clean forgot you'd been waiting this long time for your dinner!'

He hurried to the place where the elephant's allowance was usually dumped. The wind was rising outside, and the rain dashed against the belying canvas like blows from a rope strand. He took back all that remained of a bale of hay, and began to pitch it out within reach of the waving trunk.

'I wouldn't try to save my appetite, Rajah,' he said grimly. 'By all signs, your next meal is goin' to be slimmer'n this.'

He watched the elephant quickly gather up the food, and now and then, when the blinded eyes of the animal missed a wisp of hay he would push it up to him with something that was very near to tears in his own.

Poor old fellow! he muttered softly. 'I don't know what's goin' to become of us to-morrow. If Killeen had given us a chance to get another place—but you wouldn't expect that of him! Accordin' to his notion, I ought to sell you an' let you go anywhere, so long as I get rid of you. But,' Grayson reached out once more and patted the busy trunk, 'you stood by me, old fellow, an' now I'm goin' to stand by you. That's fair, ain't it?'