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# JOE STRONG

## THE BOY FISH

OR

## *MARVELOUS DOINGS IN A BIG TANK*

By

**VANCE BARNUM**

Author of "Joe Strong, the Boy Wizard," "Joe Strong on the Trapeze," etc.

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## JOE STRONG, THE BOY FISH

### CHAPTER I

#### SOMETHING WRONG

Bass drums were booming, snare drums were rattling, above them sounded the shrill notes of the bugles. There was the rumble of big-wheeled wagons, now and then an elephant trumpeted or a lion gave a hungry roar. Gay banners fluttered, glistening spears flashed with points of light, gaily attired women and men sat on the backs of swaying, ugly camels, or galloped on mettlesome steeds. And looking at it all was a vast throng of eager-eyed men, women and children. It was the opening performance of the circus.

"Good crowd all right," remarked Joe Strong, as he came back to the dressing tent from a preliminary survey of the audience. He took up one hole in the belt of his acrobatic suit of tights.

"Full house—is there?" asked a dark-complexioned, foreign-looking man, as he rubbed some rosin on the soles of his soft shoes, so they would not slip when he attempted some feat high up on a trapeze bar, or let himself down a rope head first, disdaining the use of his hands.

"I should say it is a full house!" went on Joe as he, too, went over to the rosin box. "They'll have to do as they do in theatres, and hang out the S.R.O. sign if it keeps on. It looks as though there would be standing room only before long, it certainly is starting the season good."

"I'm glad to hear it," remarked Tonzo Lascalla, one of a trio of "brothers" with whom Joe Strong did more or less dangerous things on the high trapeze. "If the owners take in plenty of money they may give us more salary."

"Not much danger of that," averred Tom Jefferson, who did a "strong man" act. "Still, we can't complain. We get pretty good money as it is."

There came a different note into the music. There were a few sharp notes on a bugle, and the strong man, who had been lying down on some boxes covered with blankets, sprang to his feet.

"Grand entry's over," he remarked. "I've got to go on!"

"And so have I!" added a clown, who had been busily engaged in painting one half of his face white and the other black. "Here we are again gentlemen!" and he turned two or three somersaults on the grass of the dressing, tent. "Whoop-la-la!" and out he ran to make his appearance in the ring. A gale of laughter followed, testifying to the effects of his antics.

"All ready, Joe?" asked Sid Lascalla, the other member of the acrobatic trio.

"Why, that isn't our call, is it?" asked Joe, who was relacing one of his shoes.

"No, but it will come in a few minutes. Are you going to try the long swing and double catch this afternoon?"

"I think we might as well, don't you? We've had enough practice at it, even though this is the first show of the season. What do you say, Tonzo?"

"Oh, I'm ready for it."

"So am I, then," added Sid. "Only let's be sure the life net is all right. The ring-attendants are apt to be a bit careless at first."

"I'll look after it," promised Joe.

The lacing of his shoes seemed to give the young trapeze performer some little concern. He did not want them too tight, and, on the other hand, they must not be loose enough to give any play to the ankles. For in a great measure the life of the young man who was soon to thrill the big audience with his daring depended on the firmness of his stand.

A fine figure of youthfulness was Joe Strong as he stood in his closely fitting red tights, tall and straight as an Indian arrow, with not an ounce of superfluous flesh, and yet not over-muscled. But the muscles he had were powerful. One could see his biceps ripple under his tights as he bent his arm, and when he straightened up there were bunches back of his shoulders that told of power there. His legs, too, on the strength of which he depended for many tricks, were symmetrical with muscles, and his hands and wrists showed force.

The young acrobat finally seemed to be satisfied with his shoes, and nodded his readiness to his two partners. In the first part of the program the three worked together as the "Lascalla Brothers," though there was no real relationship. But the name showed well on the bills, and, as a matter of fact, the three performers looked sufficiently alike.

When his part with the trio was over Joe Strong was in an act by himself, for he had made quite a name as a daring performer. He strolled over toward the entrance to the main tent—the entrance used by the performers as they emerged from the dressing tents. A girl riding a beautiful horse galloped out from the ring as Joe reached the place.

"How goes it, Helen?" asked Joe, as the rider drew her horse to one side. The animal rubbed his nose against Joe's hand. "No, I haven't any sugar now, Rosebud," said Joe with a smile. "There aren't any pockets in this suit," he went on with a laugh.

"I'll give him some as soon as I get off," promised Helen Morton, or "Mademoiselle Mortonti" as she was called on the circus bills.

"How did everything go?" asked her companion.

"Fine, Joe. Rosebud never behaved better, and the crowd was certainly generous in the way of applause."

"Glad to know it. I heard some of it. Pretty good opening then?"

"I call it so, yes."

Again the trumpet blared in a new note, and there was a scurrying on the part of some performers to leave the rings and raised platforms, while others came bustling from the dressing tent to take their places in providing entertainment for the circus throng.

"See you later!" called Joe as he hurried back to join the two Lascalla Brothers, that they might run into the ring together and stand posed for a moment, their arms on one another's shoulders, before they began their act.

"All right," answered Helen, as she rode away on her fine trick horse, Rosebud; for Helen was a fancy rider, and, in addition, had taught the animal to do many difficult tricks.

It was the first performance of the spring season for the Sampson Brothers' Circus. The winter had been spent in Bridgeport, as far as the animals were concerned, the quarters of many out-door shows being there. The performers had done as they pleased for the idle months when tent shows are out of the question. Some had filled engagements in theatres, while others had gone into retirement, some to evolve new exploits, thrilling acts and tricks.

Joe Strong had spent part of his winter doing gymnasium work. He had later filled in a few weeks on a theatrical circuit doing feats of magic. At this he was an expert, and in this line of work he had been engaged before joining the circus.

Helen Morton had been in the South, her horse with her, and she had returned a few weeks previously, joining the circus in Bridgeport to get in some needed practice before starting out on the road. Now the show was in full swing. It was a pleasant day, and a record-breaking throng had crowded into the tents. What more could circus folk ask?

"Hello, Ben!" called Joe, as he hurried back to join his two partners. "All ready for your 'death-defying dive?'"

"Yes, as ready as I'll ever be, I guess," was the somewhat despondent answer of a frail-looking youth, who was attired in a shimmering green suit made to resemble fish scales.

"Why, what's the matter, Ben Turton?" asked Joe, as he placed his hand on the shoulder of the "human fish," as Ben was known; for he did a diving act in a large glass tank filled with water, staying under about three minutes without breathing, and performing some tricks in the limpid depths.

"Oh, I don't know, Joe, what the matter is," Ben said. "I guess I'm just tired."

"What! After your winter's rest?"

"I didn't have much rest. I played two circuits."

"Oh, that's right, so you did. I'd forgotten. But is it the same old trouble you complained of last season?"

"Yes, my head—back here," and Ben put his hand to the base of his head. "But don't say anything about it. Maybe it will wear off when I get to working. I've got to go on with the act, anyhow."

"Say, it's too bad, Ben. Maybe if you were to speak to Jim Tracy——"

"No. I won't do that, Joe. Never mind about me. There's your call."

"So it is. I'll see you again. Come on, Sid—Tonzo!"

Joe clasped hands with his two fellow trapezists, and together they ran lightly out to the ring. Benny Turton followed more slowly. He was to begin his act in a few minutes. The big glass tank, filled with water, was waiting for him out on a raised platform.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he murmured. "I feel just as if something were going to happen. Oh, pshaw! I mustn't be such a kid. It'll be all right. I've gone under hundreds of times before."

He stood looking out into the main tent. He saw Joe Strong and the other two Lascallas on the trapezes high up above the life net. This the trapeze performers had inspected with unusual care, for it was the opening act of the season and, as Sid had said, some of the attendants who put it up might have been careless, particularly as a lot of new men were always hired at the beginning of the season.

After some rather usual and not very difficult acts, to get themselves warmed up, the Lascallas prepared for one of their "thrillers."

Joe climbed to a small platform, fixed high up on one of the poles at one side of the tent. Sid Lascalla occupied a similar position on the other side. Between them swung Tonzo on a trapeze.

"All ready!" cried Joe.

"Ready!" answered Sid.

Together they swung down from their platforms, each one grasping a trapeze bar. Tonzo swung first toward Sid who, at a signal, let go, and turning over and over in the air reached out his hands at the proper moment and grasped those of Tonzo. The two, clinging together, hung there a moment, swinging to and fro in a long arc.

Then, with a yell to show he was coming, Joe Strong let go of his trapeze, and launched himself toward the other two. He whirled himself about in a dizzying succession of somersaults, and then, straightening out with a jerk, he grasped the dangling legs of Sid, and hung there by his hands, the two lower acrobats being supported by Tonzo, who clung from his trapeze by his knees.

There was a burst of applause at this clever and rather dangerous trick. It was dangerous even with the life-net below them, for had the men fallen together, in a heap, they would have been hurt in spite of the net.

But the trick was over successfully. First Joe dropped into the net, then Sid and finally Tonzo, each one somersaulting down.

As Joe jumped out of the net to get ready for his next act, he saw Benny Turton leap off his platform to dive into the tank of water. It was the beginning of the acts of the "human fish."

"He seems to be all right," thought Joe. "I guess he was just nervous about the first day."

He watched the youth, and saw him make a clean dive into the water. Then there should have followed on Benny's part some queer little tricks designed to bring forth a laugh.

But as Joe watched through the glass sides of the tank, he saw a look of agony come over Ben's face. The boy seemed doubled up in a cramp, and his hand went to the back of his head.

"There's something wrong!" thought Joe in a flash. "Benny's in bad! I've got to help him!"

Joe knew the danger of creating a panic in a crowd. Whatever was done must be done quietly so as not to alarm the audience. Joe glanced about. Near him was Bill Watson, a veteran clown, pretending to play a game of ball all by himself.

Joe ran over to Bill and whispered in his ear:

"Quick, Bill! Benny's got a cramp in the tank! We've got to get him out in a hurry. Come on with me!"

## CHAPTER II

### JOE FILLS IN

For a moment Bill Watson looked as though he did not understand what Joe said to him.

"It's Ben—in the tank—something wrong," whispered Joe.

"I get you!" said Bill quickly. He dropped the big stick he was pretending to use as a bat, and hurried with Joe to the big glass tank. As yet no one else seemed to have noticed anything wrong with the "human fish." Other acts were going on around him, and the crowd, watching through the glass sides of the tank, appeared to take it all as a matter of course. Ben was still under water, but he was doing nothing save swimming about slowly—altogether too slowly, Joe thought, for it indicated that whatever ailed the "human fish" was increasing in intensity.

"What's the matter?" asked Jim Tracy of Joe, as the young acrobat and Bill hurried across the tent. "Why aren't you two going on with your acts?"

Jim Tracy was head ring-master and one of the owners of the circus.

"Ben's in some kind of a fit," answered Joe. "We've got to get him out of the tank."

"Whew! Great Scott!" exclaimed the ring-master in a low voice. "Can we do it without starting a panic?"

"We've got to," said Joe fiercely. "If the audience knows that he's nearly drowned——"

"They mustn't know," agreed Tracy. "Come on."

They fairly ran toward the glass tank. By now Ben had settled down on the bottom, an inert

form. He had been unable to hold his breath under the water, and it was filling his lungs. Joe Strong thought quickly.

He might dive into the tank and pull Benny out, for Joe had more than once on a hot day cooled off in the water in which the "human fish" did his act. But if Joe did that now it would let the people know something was wrong.

"But we've *got* to get Benny up!" Joe reasoned.

He saw, lying near the tank, one of the elephant goads—"ankus" is the Indian name for the instrument. It is shaped like a boat-hook, but is sharper.

Joe quickly caught this up. Jumping to the platform, on which the tank stood, Joe whispered to Bill Watson and Jim Tracy to stand as near him as possible.

"We can sort of screen our movements that way," he said.

Reaching the hook down into the water, Joe caught it in a portion of Benny's "fish" suit. It was an easy matter to raise the now almost drowned performer to the surface, and then lift him out into the arms of Joe, the ring-master and the clown.

"We'll have to carry him to the dressing tent and have a doctor," said Jim Tracy. "And we'll have to do it on the quiet. Get some of the clowns, Bill, and have them march in a body, carrying Benny between them. Make it look as if it was all a part of the show. Carry it off as well as you can. Though what in the world I'm going to do to explain why the tank act isn't finished, I don't know. But we've got to take care of Benny first. Is he alive yet?"

"Just about," answered Joe, making a hasty examination.

Bill Watson quickly summoned some of his fellow clowns, and on a stretcher which two of the eccentric men had been using in a funny act of their own, Benny was carried from the main tent. The clowns so surrounded him that not a glimpse did the audience have of the stretched-out, silent, green-clad figure.

"Pretend it's all a joke," whispered the ringmaster fiercely.

"Sure," muttered Bill Watson.

It was a pretty grim joke, and only the great necessity for not starting a panic in the crowd of sightseers would have induced any one to take part in it.

And while poor Ben is being carried where he can have medical attention, new readers will be told briefly something about Joe Strong as he figures in the previous books of this series.

The first volume is entitled "Joe Strong, the Boy Wizard; Or, The Mysteries of Magic Exposed." Joe, whose mother had been a circus rider under the name Madame Hortense, and whose father, a sleight-of-hand worker, was known as Professor Morretti, was, at the opening of the story, an orphan, living with Mr. and Mrs. Amos Blackford in the town of Bedford. Deacon Blackford had taken care of Joe since the boy was about five years old, and was, in a sense, his foster-father.

Joe inherited from his mother an ability to ride almost any kind of horse, and he had nerves that made him unafraid to do circus tricks at great heights. As a boy he had climbed the village church steeple, to the delight of his companions and the horror of his foster-parents.

One day "Professor Rosello" gave an exhibition of magic in Bedford, and new events in Joe's life dated from then. The young man saved the professor's life, and then, because of threatened punishment on the part of Deacon Blackford, Joe ran away from home, eventually joining Professor Rosello, who made him an assistant.

Joe Strong was then started on his career to become a magician, and he "made good," as they say in theatrical circles. He invented some startling tricks and was a great help to the professor. At one time Joe's foster-father made a serious charge against him, and our hero was on the verge of arrest.

The second volume of the series is called: "Joe Strong On the Trapeze; Or, The Daring Feats of a Young Circus Performer." In that book Joe is first met helping Professor Rosello do a "fire trick" on the stage. Something went wrong with the electrical current and the magician was in danger of being burned to death. Joe's quick work saved Professor Rosello, but the shock was so great that the magician had to give up his stage work. The professor offered to lease the show to Joe, but the young performer had received a very good offer from the Sampson Brothers' Circus to become a trapeze performer, and he accepted.

Joe had formed the acquaintance of a few of the circus folk some time before in a casual way, and he had shown what he could do on the flying rings and the trapeze, which resulted in his engagement.

Jim Tracy, the ring-master, took quite a fancy to Joe, and Benny Turton, who did the "human fish" act, was very fond of our hero. As for Joe, he was more than interested in Helen Morton. So much so, that when it came to a question of whether or not to stay with the

circus Joe decided to remain, just because he thought he might be of service to the girl rider.

He had been of great assistance to her in helping recover money left to her by her grandfather, and which a rascally law clerk nearly secured for himself. Bill Watson, the veteran clown, was also much interested in Helen and her inheritance, and he mentioned, casually, that perhaps Joe might come into money. For Mrs. Strong, who, before her marriage, was Janet Willoughby, came of a wealthy English family that had cast her off when she married Professor Morretti. But though Joe had written to England he had, as yet, received no encouraging word as to any inheritance that might come to him through his mother.

Joe is now beginning his second season with the Sampson Brothers' Circus, and the opening performance was marked by the accident which happened to Benny Turton.

"Quick now, boys!" urged the ring-master, as he walked along with the clowns who were carrying the half-unconscious form of the water performer. "I don't believe the crowd knows anything about it."

And this seemed to be the case. There were so many other things going on in the circus, so much to attract the attention, that it is doubtful if any in the throng realized that anything out of the ordinary had taken place in the big, glass tank. They may have supposed that every time, after his dive, the "human fish" was carried out that way to get ready for his next act.

For there were other parts to Benny's act. The dive into the water was really only the beginning, and no wonder Jim Tracy was anxious as to what could be done to "fill them in."

For the feats of the "human fish" had been widely advertised, and were "billed big," as it is called, on the posters. If the crowd saw no more than had been given them—merely a high dive into a comparatively shallow tank—there would be grumbling.

But, for the time being, there were no murmurings as the crowd expected Benny to come back.

Into the dressing tent the limp form, clad in its scaly green suit, was tenderly carried.

"You got him out in good shape, Joe, with that elephant hook," said Bill Watson.

"Yes. It came in nicely," said Joe, his eyes fixed on the white face of his friend. What had happened to Benny? Would he live?

Tenderly the boy—for he was only a boy—was laid on one of the cots in the dressing tent. Word of the accident had quickly but quietly passed among the circus folk, and already a messenger was on his way to summon a physician. Meanwhile first aid was being administered, for circus people have to hold themselves ready to deal with all sorts of emergencies and accidents.

"I guess he'll pull through," remarked Bill Watson, when it was seen that Benny was breathing, though very faintly.

"It was a close call," remarked another clown.

"That's what it was," agreed Jim Tracy. "A good thing you saw him in time, Joe."

"It was just chance I did, though I sort of had an eye on him. He said he didn't feel well when he started out to-day."

The physician came in. A quick examination told him the boy would live.

"Though it was a close call," he said. "There's something the matter with him besides nearly having drowned."

"What is it?" asked the ring-master.

"I can't tell. I will have to make a more careful examination—and in a hospital."

"Hospital? Then he can't go on with his act now—I mean in half an hour or so?"

"Go on with his act! I should say *not*, my dear sir! Why, the boy is near death yet. I must give him heroic treatment. I will call an ambulance."

"All right, doc. You know best. But I don't know what I'm going to do," and Jim Tracy shook a puzzled head. "The crowd will expect the tank act—he didn't do more than start it. It's been advertised all over the country. I don't know where I can get some one to take his place. This sure is hard luck, though, of course, it isn't Ben's fault, and I want you to take the best care of him you can. But who in the world can I put in on the tank act?"

"Put me in," said Joe Strong in a quiet voice.

"You?" cried Jim Tracy.

"Yes," answered the young acrobat "I can fill in all right. Let me finish out Benny's tank act."

### CHAPTER III

#### JOE IN THE TANK

Jim Tracy seemed hardly to know whether or not Joe was in earnest. They stood together, a little distance away from the cot on which lay Benny Turton, only just recovering consciousness.

"Do you really mean it, Joe?" asked the ring-master.

"I certainly do," was the answer. "I don't say I can do all the tricks Ben did, for I haven't practised them. But I may be able to improvise a few of my own."

"But can you stay under water as long as he could, Joe? That's the point. You know we bill him as remaining under a fraction over four minutes, and challenge the world to produce his equal. We even invite the public to hold their watches and keep time for themselves.

"As a matter of fact, Ben never stayed under more than four minutes, though he once, in his earliest attempts, did make it four even. But the public isn't very critical on that point. As a rule the women get nervous, and I've often heard some of 'em call out to him not to drown himself.

"But the crowd would surely expect the act to last three minutes under water—I mean three minutes at a time. Can you do that?"

"I think I can. In fact I can do better than three minutes."

"Are you sure, Joe?"

"Yes, sure."

"Of course he is," broke in a new voice, and Joe and the ring-master turned to see Helen Morton standing beside them. She had finished her act some time before.

"I heard that something had happened to Benny," she said, "and I came in to see if I could do anything. I heard what you and Joe were saying, Jim, and I couldn't help speaking as I did. I know Joe can stay under water more than three minutes."

"How?" asked the ring-master. He seemed dazed by the way things were happening. "How do you know, Helen?"

"I timed him—I held the watch on him, as you call it."

"That's what she did," confirmed Joe.

He then told, Helen adding her share to the story, how one hot day, being warm from exercises in the circus tent, he had put on a bathing suit, and gone into Benny's glass water-filled tank to cool off. While there Joe, who was an adept in the water, as are many boys who live in the country near a river, decided to test himself for under-water endurance. He filled his lungs with air and went under.

"And he stayed more than three minutes," testified Helen.

"Well, if you can do that, maybe we can pull off the act yet," agreed the ring-master, with a sigh of relief.

There was a hasty consultation. By this time the ambulance had arrived and Benny was put in it to be taken to the hospital. The physician promised to give the boy every attention, and to let the circus management know at once how he was getting along.

"Just what he is suffering from, I can't say," the doctor stated, "but it is something serious, I fear. It was something that made him incapable of helping himself or calling for help."

"All right, Joe," said the ring-master, when it was certain Benny could not finish his act. "You'd better get ready to go into the tank. Can you wear Benny's suit?"

"I guess so, but it will be a pretty tight fit. It's wet, too, and it isn't going to be easy to get into it."

The green, scaly, fish suit had been taken off Benny before he was put into the ambulance.

Joe found he could squeeze into the suit. It was of rubber, and stretched some.

"I'll be ready in a few minutes," he told the ring-master. "You go out and make whatever

announcement you please. Sort of tone it down for me, for I don't know that I can please the public on such short notice, particularly as I haven't practised any of Ben's tricks."

"Can't you do some of your own?" asked Helen, as she was leaving the tent, having come back to see how Joe looked in the fish suit. "I mean some of those you used to do with Professor Rosello?"

"That's so—I might," said Joe reflectively. "I've got a box of apparatus in my trunk."

"I'll help you get it out," offered the pretty little trick rider.

"Thanks," murmured Joe.

Jim Tracy hurried out to the main tent, where he knew the crowd would be waiting for the rest of the tank act. The ring-master signaled to the band that he was going to say something.

The music stopped.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Jim Tracy, "there has been a slight mishap to Mr. Turton, who, a little while ago, dived into this glass tank which you see before you," and he waved a hand toward the tank. "Mr. Turton is unable to go on with the act for the present, being, in fact, under the care of one of your local physicians. As you all know we advertised to show the 'human fish,' and if there is one thing more than another that the Sampson Brothers try to do it is to keep their word—keep faith—with the public. As we advertise so we do. And I say, without fear of successful contradiction, that there is not one act down on the show bills or posters—not one pageant, not one wild animal, not a riding act, not a driving act, not a trapeze act, which we advertise, that we do not give you complete, in full and in its entirety.

"We have advertised to give you a fancy diving act in a glass tank of water, and you have all seen that. Mr. Turton before he was unfortunately taken ill, did that part of his act. But he is unable to go on. And I am now about to introduce to you a young man who will take his place. You have all seen him. But a little while ago he thrilled you, in company with his partners, the Lascalla Brothers, in a high trapeze act. It was while doing this that the young man I am about to bring to your favorable notice saw Mr. Turton in distress in the tank. Mr. Joe Strong, as he is known in private life, acted promptly and pulled Mr. Turton from the tank. He saved his life, though, in order not to alarm you, we did not let that fact become known until just now."

There was a murmur in the crowd, and some applause. Clearly the announcement was a surprise.

"What do you think of that?" was asked on all sides.

"And now," went on Jim Tracy, "following the invariable policy of the Sampson Brothers' Circus, we are going to keep our word again, and give you just what we advertised we would—a wonderful under-water act, full of thrills, and interesting in the extreme. But I must crave your slight indulgence, and I feel sure that, under the circumstances, you will extend it to, not only myself and the show management, but to the young man who has volunteered to take the place of the 'human fish' on such short notice.

"You will see by the circus posters that we claim Mr. Turton can stay under water four minutes. This he has done time and again, as you who have seen him before can bear witness. And if any of you think it is easy to do that, just take out your watch, and hold your breath for four minutes out here in the tent—not under water, where to breathe means death—yes, ladies and gentlemen—death!"

The ring-master paused impressively.

"Now we do not claim that Mr. Strong will be able to stay under water four minutes. Three, I believe, is his limit. But you must remember, ladies and gentlemen, that he is doing this act in public for the first time, and that merely to help out the show and prevent you from being disappointed.

"He will endeavor to remain under water three minutes at a time, and will also offer for your approval a few tricks. But I wish to state that staying under water even three minutes is a feat of no mean ability. We do not say that no one else can do it, though we have a standing offer of a thousand dollars to any one who will duplicate the feat of Mr. Turton, and remain under four minutes. But under the circumstances that offer is withdrawn.

"But if any of you think it is easy to stay under three minutes just try to hold your breath for the time Mr. Strong remains under water. I venture to say none of you can do it."

Again the ring-master paused for dramatic effect. Then he took out his watch, and looked toward the entrance to the dressing tent. One of the attendants signaled that Joe was ready.

"Ladies and gentlemen," went on Jim Tracy, "I now take great pleasure in introducing to you Joe Strong, the boy fish, and I crave your slight indulgence under the circumstances. Remember he is only filling in at an emergency. So do not be over critical. Mr. Strong!"



The band blared out as Joe walked up on the platform beside the ring-master and threw off his bath robe, revealing himself in the scaly green suit Benny had worn.

Joe bowed right and left.

"I will now leave Mr. Strong to entertain you, my friends," concluded the ring-master.

There was another blare of music, and Joe started up the steps that led to the platform from which Benny had dived. Joe was going to start the trick in the same way.

"Though I hope what happened to Benny, whatever it was, doesn't happen to me," thought the young acrobat.

He poised for an instant on the small platform, and then with a quick spring launched himself into the air. Joe brought into play one of his trapeze tricks, and turned three somersaults before he struck the water. In he went, with a little splash, and, a moment later, he opened his eyes under water, staring out through the glass sides of the tank at the expectant throngs in the circus tent.

## CHAPTER IV

### BAD NEWS

There was applause at Joe's rather fancy dive—a more elaborate entering of the water than Benny had been in the habit of presenting. But Joe could not hear the people clapping, for he was under water, and all sound was lost to him. He could, however, see the motions of their hands, and by the interested looks on their faces he judged that the audience was pleased.

"Now if I don't get rattled when I do some of my tricks, I may be able to pull off a good stunt in the tank," thought Joe. "Well, here goes for it, anyhow."

All this while, of course, Joe was under water and could not breathe. But he had first deflated and then inflated his lungs to their fullest capacity, and he felt sure he could remain at least three minutes, possibly longer, without coming to the surface.

The glass tank in which Joe was performing—Benny's tank, to be exact, for the "human fish" owned it—was practically a big glass box. That is, four sides of it were of glass, measuring eight feet each way, thus giving Joe nearly eight feet of water into which to dive.

Not a very great depth for a high dive, but there are tricks of diving, as all know, and dives from a pole sixty feet high into a tank not more than four feet deep have been made. For this the instant the surface of the water is struck the body must curve upward, also curving upward the extended arms and hands. The result is a "shallow dive," and a shot to the surface of the water almost as soon as it is entered. However, a dive into shallow water is always a dangerous thing even for an expert swimmer.

The glass tank was then of good size for the purpose for which it was designed. The top was, of course, fully open, and the bottom was of metal, covered with a layer of white sand. This not only made an agreeable surface on which the performer could recline, but it reflected the light, and made every action of the person under water visible to the audience.

The glass, being on all four sides of the tank, of course gave a clear view all around the big circus ring, and as the tank stood on a raised platform the "human fish" act was one of the best-viewed acts in the show. At each corner of the tank were heavy metal strips which held the glass sides. The metal strips were bound with rubber to prevent leakage.

As has been said, Joe deflated his lungs just before he took his dive. He did this by standing in a drooping position, with his shoulders sagging forward. He actually pressed from his lungs all the air possible. This was to enable him to fill them again with a fresh supply, rich in oxygen. For it is with the air he takes into his lungs before he plunges into the water that a diver keeps himself alive.

Joe had watched Benny inflate his lungs, and Joe himself had a way of his own of doing this, for he had often swum comparatively long distances under water when a boy, and he had learned the necessity of fully and properly filling his lungs with air.

"Well, it seems to be going all right so far," thought Joe as he found that it was no harder to stay under water now than it was the time he had practised before in the tank, with Helen timing him. "Now for a few tricks."

It had been Benny's habit to swim about after entering the tank, imitating a fish as nearly as possible. Perhaps it would be more correct to say a seal; for a seal in the water more nearly resembles a human being than does a fish, which has no need of breathing air into the lungs, as a seal does. The gills of a fish are so constructed as to extract the oxygen from water,

erving the purpose the lungs do in the air. Probably all know that a fish can "drown," if the functions of the gills are interfered with.

"Now for some fancy swimming," thought Joe. He began whirling about in the water, as he had seen Benny do, turning over and over in a graceful fashion, just as a seal does. Joe really turned backward and forward somersaults under water, but of course he did it more slowly than the feats would be performed in the air. And in a sense it was easier, for the water supported him all around.

For the present Joe was not trying for an endurance test, and when he had shown three or four different styles of swimming—the old-fashioned breast stroke, the Australian crawl, the overhand style, and so on—he came up.

This was not done to get air, as he had not been under more than two minutes, and he could stay much longer than that. But it was to make the act last a little longer, and to give the ring-master a chance to make a further announcement as to what was to take place.

Always, on a stage, in a theatre or in a circus, the effect of an act is "heightened" as it is called, it is made more dramatic and the public is more deeply impressed, if some one, even the performer, states just what is going to be done, with, perhaps, a reference to the danger or difficulty of it. In this case there was no particular danger, as Joe could come up whenever he wanted to. But it is not easy to stay under water for three minutes.

Joe shot up to the top of the water, and climbed, dripping wet, out on to the rubber-covered platform. He nodded to Jim Tracy to let the ring-master know he was now ready for the second part of the performance.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" cried the circus man, "Mr. Strong will now show you how long he can remain under water. He is going to attempt to stay three minutes—possibly longer. Of course that is not the record, but you are aware of the circumstances under which this act is being done to-day. During his stay under water Mr. Strong will do some tricks to amuse you. Ready!"

The band blared out as Joe bowed, and once more he made himself ready for the under-water act. While Jim Tracy had been speaking Joe had deflated his lungs, and now he took a full, long and deep breath. Then in he plunged.

As soon as he was on the bottom of the tank, lying full length on the bed of soft white sand, an attendant lowered to him a metal box containing some of Joe's trick apparatus.

"If I have to do this tank act often I can get some water-proof apparatus made," thought Joe. "But I guess Benny will be back on the job in a few days. I might teach him how to do tricks."

Raising himself on his elbow, with his head resting on his hand in a careless and comfortable attitude, as though lying under water without breathing were the most natural thing in the world, Joe juggled with three small iron balls, using only one hand. It was an easy enough trick to do "on land" so to speak, but Joe found that the balls did not move so freely in the water, and he had to make his motions slower. However, the trick seemed to be appreciated, for he could see the people applauding.

"If I only had some celluloid playing cards, I could do some tricks with those under water," Joe reasoned, as he kept juggling the balls. "Water won't hurt celluloid. I must have a pack made." Joe was an adept at card tricks, and they would show off well under water, he thought.

In order that the audience on all sides of him might see, Joe now turned slowly about under water, facing to the four sections of the tank.

He was beginning to wonder how many minutes had now ticked off, but he knew it could not be three yet, though he was beginning to feel the strain. He had not had as much practice at holding his breath under water as Benny Turton.

"It might be a good thing to have a clock just outside the tank where I could look at it," thought Joe. "That's another point I'll suggest to Benny when he gets back to work."

After his juggling act was over Joe did a few simple "disappearance" tricks—that is he showed objects, such as cubes and balls, in his hands and then, by a mere motion, he caused them to vanish. This he accomplished by the familiar "palming" method. Also he concealed the things in the false bottoms of two metal vases he was using under water.

It was not a very finished performance, and Joe really had not had time to work out as many details as he wished. But he was doing very well, and the audience seemed pleased. At any rate a panic had been averted and the circus crowd was not given a chance to find fault because something down on the programme had not been given. The management had kept faith with the public.

Joe's head was beginning to ache a little now, and his chest felt the strain of holding his breath. But he was not going to come up yet. Benny had done a trick of picking up in his mouth a number of metal coins from the bottom of the tank. Joe wished he had practised

that trick, but he had not, and he knew it would be risky to attempt it. However, he decided to try and see if he could open his mouth under water.

It was not easy, but he did it. A little water got down his throat, but he found that by pressing the back of his tongue up against his soft palate he could close the opening to the throat and wind-pipe, and, at the same time, open his mouth.

"If I keep on I'll be able to eat under water," thought Joe, "and that's something Ben can't do—or, at least, hasn't done."

Then Joe bethought himself of a little finish to his tank act. He knew he must bring it to a close soon now, for he was about at the limit of his ability to hold his breath.

It might be said that the ability to hold one's breath differs greatly in individuals. It follows that a person of large lung capacity is able to fill himself with a greater amount of oxygen than a person whose lungs are not well developed.

The world's record, it is said, is four minutes and thirty-seven seconds, and is held by a man. A girl, about eighteen years old, has remained under water doing various things, such as picking up objects in her mouth, three and a half minutes. It can be seen that it is not always a man or a boy who has the largest lung capacity. This girl was not remarkable for size, being, in fact, rather frail. But she had under-water endurance down to a science, and it is even said that her last record was four minutes.

Sponge and pearl divers of tropical countries are credited with power to remain under water for long periods—some claim five minutes—but the records give about three minutes as the average, though it is possible that some exceptional individual may equal five minutes. But they have to work hard while under water, and, of course, divers go deeper than the eight feet in Joe's tank.

Opening his mouth under water gave the young performer an idea.

He stretched out his arms in a tired and lazy manner, yawned with wide-open mouth as though sleepy, and then, using the box his tricks came in as a pillow, he stretched out on the sandy bottom of the tank, and pretended to go to sleep.

And this, coming at the end of his little performance, and when he had been under water nearly three minutes, made quite an impression on the crowd. There was some laughter at Joe's comical antics, but there were also murmurs of wonder at his endurance.

However, Joe was about at the end of this now. His head felt dizzy and it seemed as if his lungs would burst through his chest, so great was the confined pressure on them now.

Still he knew he must not hurry up, gasping for breath. Benny never did that, but came out as though he could have stayed under all day if he had cared to. It made a far neater finish to the act.

So Joe slowly opened his eyes, pretended to look at a watch as though it were time to get up, and then he slowly floated to the top of the water.

And oh! how good it did feel to get that breath of air. He wanted to gulp in a whole lot of it at once, but he held himself in reserve, and tried to breathe naturally. It was hard work, though.

"Three minutes and four seconds!" announced the ring-master, as he held up his watch. "If I am wrong correct me, friends."

"Good work! Fine, Joe!" cried the ring-master. "You saved the day for us. I put some one else on your trapeze for the time being. I thought you wouldn't want to go on."

"No, hardly. Glad you did. Do you think it went all right?"

"It sure did!"

"Oh, Joe! I'm so glad—for you!" exclaimed Helen as the young performer went down the steps to the ground.

"Look out! I'll get you all wet!" he warned her.

"I don't mind," she answered blushing. "Oh, it was great!"

"I'll do better, next time," Joe said. "I wonder how Benny is? I think I'll go to the hospital and find out as soon as I get into my regular clothes."

"I'll go with you," offered Helen.

The two young people, their circus work over for the afternoon, were soon on their way to the hospital. The doctor who had attended Benny in the tent met them.

"Well, what's the news?" asked Joe.

"It's bad, I'm sorry to say," was the answer.

"Is—is Benny going to die?" asked Helen, clasping Joe's arm.

"No, he won't die, but it will be a long while before he can join the circus again."

## CHAPTER V

### JOE'S PROMISE

Joe Strong gave a low whistle. It expressed at once surprise and dismay. He looked at Helen, and saw in her eyes deep sorrow for the unfortunate youth. For Benny Turton was loved by every one in the circus. His act was so peculiar that there was no professional jealousy against him, as there was against other performers, including Joe. And Benny was a gentle youth.

"Not able to join the circus again," repeated Joe.

"No," replied the physician.

"What is the trouble?" Helen queried. "Was he hurt in the tank?"

"Well, it wasn't an accident, if you mean it that way," went on the doctor. "But his injuries and condition are due to long-continued tank-work."

"How is that?" inquired Joe. He was interested, not only because he liked Benny Turton, but from a personal standpoint. Joe might have to give several more performances in the tank before some one was obtained to fill Benny's place, or until a new "thriller" was substituted for the tank scene, and Joe did not wish to run any chances. He had felt no ill effects from his immersion, save a slight inconvenience due to holding his breath, and this had passed as soon as he was out of the water.

"Your friend Benny's trouble," said the physician, "is due to staying so long under water. I don't mean staying under too long at one time—there is a limit which nature fixes in that case. But I understand he has been doing this act twice a day now for some years. He works, so I am told, under about eight feet of water. Of course divers have withstood greater pressures than that, but Benny has done it so constantly that he had injured himself."

"Permanently?" Joe asked.

"That remains to be seen. But it is certain now that he is in great danger of becoming deaf and dumb."

"Oh!" exclaimed Helen, sympathetically. "Poor Benny, never to speak or hear again!"

"Well, we may be able to save him, but that can not yet be said with certainty," stated the doctor. "You see the water pressure on his ear drums, and on his vocal cords, caused by his act in picking up coins in his mouth while under water, has, to a certain extent, injured them. He is in a bad way now."

"Can he speak?" asked Helen.

"Only a little. And he can hear less."

"We'd like to see him," put in Joe.

"I think that can be arranged," the doctor said. "I'll go and find out how he is now."

"That was the meaning of all the pains and queer feelings Benny had," said Joe to Helen, as they were left alone in the waiting room of the hospital. "You know he often spoke about a pain at the back of his head."

"Yes, you mentioned it several times," Helen remarked. "Oh, I am so sorry for him! I wonder if there is anything we can do for him."

"I'll find out when we see him," answered Joe. "But I don't know what I ought to do. If he can't go on with his act to-night——"

"Oh, surely he can't!" Helen interrupted.

"No, I reckon not," Joe agreed slowly. "Well, that means I'll have to do it, I suppose, if they have it billed. It won't do to shut it off suddenly. We'll have to wait until we get to another town, and we show here another day. I guess I'll have to let Jim Tracy know that Benny won't be with the show again right away."

"I suppose that would be best," Helen said. "We'll go back to the tent as soon as we've seen Benny."

They found the young circus tank-actor propped up in the clean, white hospital bed, with a pleasant-faced nurse hovering about him. Benny looked pale and wan, though perhaps some of his pallor was caused by the white pillows and bedspread.

"Well, old man, how goes it?" asked Joe, as he walked up, with extended hand.

Benny smiled, but did not answer.

"You'll have to speak louder," the nurse said. "He's quite deaf, you know."

Joe, for the moment, had forgotten. He repeated his question in louder tones.

Benny fumbled under the bedclothes and brought out a pad and pencil.

"The doctor doesn't want him to speak for a while," the nurse explained, for the physician, after telling Joe and Helen they might go up, had been called to see another patient. "He will write his answers, and he can hear if you speak quite loudly."

Benny wrote:

"I'm feeling better. Glad you came. What did they do about my act?"

"Oh, I went through with it—after a fashion," said Joe, making himself understood. "It's all right, Ben. I didn't do as well as you, of course, and I couldn't stay under as long. But I did the best I could."

"We're mighty sorry this happened to you, but if you take a rest you'll be all right again."

"That's just it," Benny wrote on the pad. "I can't afford to take a rest. I must get back as soon as I can to help support my mother."

Joe did not know what to say. But he shook his head, and, after a moment's thought, remarked.

"Well, you can't work to-night, Ben, so I'll go into the tank again for you. After that we'll see what's to be done. Now don't you worry, everything will be all right."

"We all miss you," said Helen, as she shook hands with the youth. "Get well as soon as you can and come back to us."

Benny nodded, and tears came into his eyes, so that he turned away his head.

"I don't like to drive you away," the nurse put in smiling, "but I think he has seen you long enough for the present."

"May I come back later?" asked Joe.

"Perhaps—if the doctor says so. But we'll take good care of him."

"Oh, I know that!" Joe declared.

He and Helen bade Benny good-bye and went out, feeling rather sad. It had all happened so suddenly, and the prospects were not very bright for the young circus performer.

"What's to be done?" asked Helen.

"I don't know," Joe was frank enough to say. "I'll have to have a talk with Jim Tracy."

The ring-master shook his head when Joe reported to him the unsatisfactory result of the visit to the hospital.

"It looks bad, Joe," said Jim.

"That's what I think."

"Can you go into the tank again to-night?"

"I guess so. You'll have to fill in part of my trapeze work though."

"Well, I can do that more easily than I can get some one to work the tank act. It's lucky you practised that."

"It was luck—nothing else. Well, I'll do the best I can. I'm going to see Benny to-morrow, and there may be a change for the better."

"I hope there is. I don't want to lose him out of the show."

Joe went into the tank again at night. It was rather more spectacular in the evening, for special lights above the big glass box filled with water made it sparkle when the bubbles arose as Joe went through one trick after another.

He did pretty much as he had done in the afternoon, and his act was even better received. The crowd applauded loudly. Joe did not try to stay under water any longer at the evening performance than he had done in the afternoon.

"Time enough to work up that end of it if I have to keep on with the act," he thought.

When he saw Benny at the hospital the next day, it was made certain that Joe would have to keep on with the act, at least for the present, if it was to be billed with the circus.

Poor Benny was worse, instead of better. He could hardly hear and he was too weak to write much. But he did manage to scribble a note:

"Dear Joe," he wrote. "I don't know what to do. I haven't been able to save any money, and my mother is an invalid, needing much care. I must try to get back to the tank as soon as possible."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," wrote Joe in reply, for he did not wish to shout for fear of annoying the patients in the rooms near by. "Now don't worry, Ben. It will be all right."

Then Joe wrote out a promise, the keeping of which made quite a change in his prospects, and, for a time, caused him to be misjudged by his friends.

But Benny had a happier look on his face when Joe went out, and the suffering boy put under his pillow a precious piece of paper.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SHOW MOVES ON

"What's the news?" asked Jim Tracy, as Joe came back from the hospital.

"Not very good," was the reply. "Benny's worse."

"Then he won't be with us to-day?"

"No, and not for some days to come, I fancy."

"Will you do the act this afternoon and to-night then, Joe? You see we've billed it big here, and it's too late to make a change in this town. When we move on we can drop out that act without its being so noticeable. If necessary I can have that part of our bill poster advertising covered up with blank sheets, though I hate to. But that's all there is to be done if Benny can't act."

"No, he can't act," Joe said. "I'll go on to-day, of course. The Lascalla Brothers won't kick, will they?"

"I don't care if they do. You can do your principal stunts with them, and we'll shove the tank act back on the programme so as to give you a chance to make the change. I suppose, though, if you keep too much out of the Lascalla act they will be kicking."

"They may want another partner," suggested Joe.

"That's right," agreed the ring-master. "But there's one thing, though. If they ask to have Sim Doble back again I'll tell 'em it can't be done. I won't have that fellow around. That's flat, let me tell you."

Sim Doble at one time was one of the Lascalla trio. He was discharged for misconduct, and Joe was given his place in an emergency. This angered Sim and he threatened revenge. Though the other two Lascallas—Tonzo and Sid—wanted Sim back, and though Joe suspected them of at least once trying to cause him to get a humiliating fall, nothing had come of Sim's threats.

"Yes, they may want him back," Joe admitted. "But I don't know just what I can do. I'll go on with as much of my trapeze work here as I can, and also do the tank act. But when we move on——"

"We'll talk of that later," interrupted the ring-master. "Well, what is it?" he asked as a man came running up to him.

"A boy just got clawed by the lion," the man said. "Went too near the cage."

"Blame those kids!" cried Jim. "Well, I'll be right over. Have some of the animal men attend to the lad, and I'll get a doctor. Was he one of our boys?"

"No, some kid who wanted to carry water for the elephants. He isn't clawed bad—just on his hand."

"Well, I'm glad it isn't bad."

In spite of his vexation against the lad, Jim had a kind spot in his heart.

The ring-master went to see about the lad, who, it appeared, in his eagerness to get a view of the animals in their cages, had gone too near the one containing a dangerous lion. With a quick, cat-like motion of his great claw, the big beast had ripped some skin from the boy's outstretched hand. A doctor soon made him comfortable.

Joe looked for Helen to tell her about Benny.

"Oh, I'm so sorry for him!" she exclaimed. "Is there anything I can do?"

"I don't believe so," was the answer. "He'll have to stay in the hospital for a while."

Joe did not find it exactly easy to fill the rôle of two performers, but he did his best, and cheerfully, for he felt he owed a debt of gratitude to Jim Tracy for giving him a chance in the circus.

Joe first had to dress for the trapeze work, and go through with those exploits which were not easy, especially the long swing and the triple suspension. Then Joe, alone, did an act which has been fully described in the book just previous to this one. It is called the "drop back to instep hang," and Joe did it in such a way that it was very thrilling. The act looked as though an accident had happened and that Joe was falling from the trapeze. But he caught himself in the nick of time.

Joe also did some tricks on a long suspended rope, fastened high in the tent. He slid rapidly down this, headforemost, without the use of his hands. He dropped until it seemed certain that his head would hit the ground, but he stopped himself when about an inch away, amid the plaudits of the crowd.

Then, when he had finished this thrilling work, Joe had to hurry to the dressing tent and put on the green fish suit.

The young "fish" was more at home in the tank on the second day than he had been when he first made his bow to the public in the shimmering, green, scaly suit. He was not so nervous, and this made it easier for him to hold his breath.

Joe also worked in a few new tricks. He spent the morning of the second day of the circus going over his box of apparatus, and he made some changes in certain pieces to enable them to be used under water. Joe tried to get some celluloid playing cards, but found they would have to be made to order, so he wrote to Professor Rosello, his former chief, and asked him to get them for him.

The professor was still resting, and his show, under lease, was on the road. Joe kept up a correspondence with the man who had given him such a good start toward becoming a public entertainer, and the professor was always glad to hear of the success of his protégé.

The circus performers who knew Benny, and there were few who at least did not have some sort of an acquaintance with him, were very sorry to learn of his disablement.

"Well, it's too bad he can't be with us!" said motherly Mrs. Talfo, the fat woman. "Benny sure was a nice little boy, and I'm certainly sorry for him."

"So am I," affirmed Señorita Tanlozo, the snake charmer. "He got me some medicine once, when I had a terrible toothache, and I'll never forget it."

"And will he not ever be able to appear in public again?" asked Señor Bogardi, the lion tamer.

"I don't know about that," answered Joe. "Never is a long while. He'll have to stay in the hospital for some time, the doctor says."

"Ugh! Hospitals!" exclaimed Madame Bullriva, the strong woman. "Deliver me from them. They mean all right—those doctors and nurses—but it's awful trying to lie on your back and want a drink of water."

"Especially if you happen to know that you could get up and lift a barrel of it, if you weren't ill," put in Tonzo Lascalla. "Yes, I, too, am sorry for Benny. But it is what will happen to all of us in this business."

"What will happen?" asked the snake charmer.

"Oh, we will be down and out some day. You may play once too often with that big constrictor which you let twine about your waist. Some day he will squeeze you too hard—Poof! You are dead!"

"Well, I must say you are not very cheerful!" exclaimed Señorita Tanlozo.

"Oh, well, what matter?" asked the trapeze performer, with a shrug of his shoulders.

The circus parade was over. The procession had returned to the grounds and dinner was being served. The afternoon performance would soon be under way.

"Well, Joe, all ready for another swim?" asked Helen, as she passed the "boy fish" (as he had

been dubbed by some) on her way to look after Rosebud.

"Yes, all ready to get wet again," he answered. "How's the nice horse?"

"All right. He was asking for you," and she laughed at her little joke.

Joe's trapeze work went off well, and, hurrying to the dressing tent, he donned the green suit. Again the ring-master made his announcement about Joe, and the youth, inflating his lungs to their capacity, plunged in.

Joe knew the value of a laugh, even in a thrilling scene, and this time he had prepared a few simple but laughable tricks to perform under water. They all worked well, and Joe brought the act to a close with his "sleep," which again won him applause.

That afternoon Joe paid another visit to the hospital where Benny was a patient. The "human fish" was in great pain, and Joe could only see him for a few minutes.

"I think we shall have to operate on him, eventually," the doctor said.

Joe wrote Benny a cheering message, and hurried back to the tent to get ready for the evening performance.

The tank act went off well, and to add to it Bill Watson, the veteran clown, rigged up a pole and line, and pretended to be fishing in the big glass box. Joe, who entered into the spirit of the occasion, caught the hook as he was lying on the sandy bottom, and fastened on it a rubber boot, which Bill pulled up and regarded with comical gravity.

When amid applause Joe came up out of the tank after an immersion of nearly three and a quarter minutes, Jim Tracy gave orders to have the water emptied out, and the tank packed for transportation. The glass sides were removable.

"I don't know whether we'll have any use for it again or not," said the ring-master. "How about it, Joe?"

"I'll tell you later," was the answer.

"Say, what about Benny Turton?" asked Tom Jefferson, the strong man, as the performance came to a close and the crowd was filing out. "Can he travel on with us?"

"No," answered Joe. "He will have to stay behind when the show goes on."

And, as the circus was to play in another town the next day, the show "moved on."

Benny Turton, the "human fish," was left behind. But it had to be so. There was no other way.

"Poor boy," murmured Helen, as she thought of the slight figure resting in the white hospital bed. "Poor boy! I suppose they'll all forget him soon—when they have a new act in place of his."

But Joe Strong did not forget the promise which he had written on Benny's pad—the promise which was under the pillow of the "human fish."

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **JOE'S OFFER**

Joe Strong turned over in his berth in the circus sleeping car. Something had awakened him from a sound sleep. At first he was not aware what it was, but as his brain cleared he realized that it was some sound of confusion outside the car.

"Where are we?" he asked, for he saw Tonzo Lascalla, his trapeze partner, peering from between the curtains of his berth across the aisle.

"I think we are in," was the answer, meaning that the circus train had reached its destination. "We are on the siding, but it isn't time to get up yet, thank goodness."

"Yes, let us sleep," begged a yawning voice. "Keep still, can't you?"

"Sounds as if something had happened," commented Joe. He looked out of the window of his berth, but it was too dark yet to see more than a confused jumble of black shapes moving about. Joe saw another train on the track alongside of the sleeping cars. It was a train of "flats," on which the animal cages were carried.

"Look out now! There he goes! Get after him, some of you men!" a voice ordered.



There was a crash of breaking wood, more shouts and the noise of a cracking whip.

"Or maybe shots!" exclaimed Joe, half aloud. "I wonder if any of the wild animals have escaped."

A moment later, however, there was the sound of laughter.

"Whoop!" a man yelled. "Here he comes at us! Look out! There, he's got Bill down!"

There were excited yells, and a voice, presumably Bill's, was heard to exclaim:

"Get off my leg, you big brute! Wow! If you step on me again I'll be as flat as a board seat! Here, somebody take him off me!"

There was a stir inside the sleeping car, for most of the occupants were now awake.

"For the love of Mike!" grumbled Tom Jefferson, the strong man. "Can't they let a person get his sleep? Are they giving a private rehearsal out there, or what's going on?"

"I guess some of the animals are loose," said Joe, "though it doesn't seem to be serious."

More shouts, mingled with laughter, seemed to testify to this view of it.

"I'm going out to see what it is," decided Joe. He looked off toward the east. A faint glow there told that dawn was beginning to break, though it was still very dark. "I've had enough sleep," Joe reasoned, "and I can't get any more with all that racket going on under my car window."

He quickly dressed and went out, he alone of those in his car caring to see what the trouble was. The rest of the circus men preferred to turn over for a possible "forty winks" more.

As Joe was making his way toward the place where he could see a crowd of men about some central object, he heard a voice calling to him from one of the windows of the sleeping car occupied by the women of the circus troupe.

"What has happened?" some one asked. "Is it a wreck?"

"No, nothing as bad as that, I guess, Helen," Joe replied, recognizing the tones of the pretty trick rider. "Some of the animals seem to be out. I'm going to see."

"Come back and tell me about it. I hope it isn't one of the cats."

"So do I," Joe said. "But I don't believe it is. I'll let you know."

Circus folk and animal men in general speak of lions, tigers and other beasts of the feline tribe as "cats," and elephants, camels, horses and their like are known in show parlance as "hay animals," because hay is their principal fodder.

Joe hurried on to the crowd gathered about one of the flat cars.

"Look out! He's loose again!" came the yell, and Joe saw the crowd part, and a big ungainly animal come charging through.

"It's the hippopotamus!" cried Joe. "The big brute is loose!"

The big animal, the "blood-sweating behemoth of Holy Writ," as it is sometimes called on the circus bills, was out of his tank wagon, and seemed to enjoy his liberty.

"Look out there!" some one in the crowd yelled to Joe. "If he stamps on you there won't be anything left of you."

"I guess that'll be true enough," thought Joe. For the hippopotamus weighed nearly two tons, being one of the largest specimens in captivity.

On came the big beast, now and then opening its huge mouth, as Joe could see in the light that was beginning to break. Some of the crowd of men came rushing after the hippopotamus with ropes, but the animal moved faster than one would suppose a creature of his bulk could travel.

"Stop him! Stop him, somebody!" came a voice. "If he gets on the track an engine may hit him!"

That, Joe knew, would be a serious loss. For the animal was valuable, having cost the Sampson Brothers four thousand dollars originally, and his value had increased. Joe remembered hearing that Jumbo, the big elephant, many years ago, had been struck by an engine and killed, his skeleton now being in the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

"Get him! Get him!" begged the head animal man.

"I wish I could!" thought Joe.

As he moved to get out of the way of the beast the young acrobat stumbled over a coil of

rope which had been used to let some of the heavy wagons down the gangplank off the flat cars.

"If I could only lasso him with the rope it might stop him," thought Joe. "But I don't know how to manage a lasso, even if I could tie a noose in this rope. And I don't see how one lassoes a hippo anyhow. However, here goes! I'll do the best I can. Maybe I can tangle his feet up in the kinks of the rope so he'll fall."

Joe caught up the rope, and, without trying to straighten out the coils, threw it at the big animal, which was opposite him, Joe having leaped to one side. And he did by accident what the circus men had for some time been trying to do by design. He threw coils of the rope about the short legs of the "river horse" and down went the hippopotamus with a thud.

"That's the stuff! Good work!" cried the animal's keeper. "Quick now, boys! Rope him!"

Before the beast could get up he was pounced upon by a crowd of the animal men and securely bound with ropes.

"Whew!" exclaimed the keeper, as he faced Joe in the now gray dawn of the morning, "that was some work!"

"How did he get loose?" Joe asked.

"The bottom dropped out of his wagon. Must have been rotten. He dropped with it and started off on his own hook. He walked all over a lot of us while we were trying to corner him."

"Walked on us! Say, he danced a jig on my stomach!" complained Bill Dudley, one of the animal men, as he came limping up. "Have you got him safe?"

"Yes," replied the keeper.

"Well, don't let him get loose again. He almost made a pancake of me!"

The circus men now led the subdued beast to temporary quarters until his own cage could be repaired, and the work of unloading the rest of the circus was proceeded with.

"Is it all right?" Helen asked Joe, as he walked back to his car.

"Yes. The excitement is all over. It was the hippo," and he told what had taken place.

"And you caught him?" asked Helen.

"Oh, it was just luck," said Joe modestly. "I didn't take any chances, you may be sure."

"Maybe he thought you were a friend of his, because you work in a tank, too," laughed Helen, for the wagon in which the hippopotamus was kept was in two parts, one end being a tank for water.

"Maybe," agreed Joe. And at that laughing speech there came to mind a matter he knew must be settled. What would be done about Benny's tank act? The question would come up that day.

Breakfast was served to the circus folk in the big tent, which had been put up in advance. The earliest arrivals at the circus ground are the tent men, the cooks with their big stoves on heavy wagons, and the animals. So that when the performers get up they generally find a hot breakfast ready for them.

After the meal Joe strolled across the lot, watching the men at work. Some of them were gathered about the wagon containing the glass tank in which Benny, the "human fish," had done his act.

"You needn't open that," said Jim Tracy, who was already around, looking after his many duties. "We won't set up the tank."

"Why not?" asked one of the men.

"Because Benny isn't with us any more. We'll have to cut out the fish act."

Joe Strong heard this, and came to a sudden decision—and yet not so sudden, either, for he had given it considerable thought.

"Look here, Mr. Tracy," he said. "I don't believe we'll have to give up the tank act after all."

"Why not?"

"Well, can't I do it well enough?"

"Oh, it isn't a question of that, Joe. You sure did make a hit with it. But I thought you'd rather keep at your trapeze work."

"So I would—for a while at any rate. But why can't I do part of the trapeze act, and the rest of my stunts in the tank? I like it. I'm sure I can do better the more practice I have. I'll make

you that offer—to do the tank act and as much of my trapeze work as I have time for. What do you say?"

"Why, I guess I'll say 'yes,'" replied the ring-master. "I only thought you were doing it to fill in at our opening engagement; to prevent the public's howling, Joe. But if you want to keep on with it, why, I'm willing, and thankful too."

"All right, I'll do it!" decided Joe.

"Good! Unpack the tank, boys!" cried Jim Tracy. "Set her up and fill her with water. We'll have a 'boy fish' act after all!"

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **EXPERIMENTS**

Since Joe Strong had decided that he would make of the tank act a better performance than had been possible the first two days of the opening of the circus season, he now resolved to watch the setting up of the big glass box. Joe wanted to learn all he could about the accessories of the act, for he had some new ideas he intended to put into effect if he found that he could succeed in the new work that had come to him by accident.

"Perhaps I can get up a new idea in regard to dressing the act," thought Joe. "If I can, it may take even better than it has, and I can hold the public with me until I can develop my lung power and stay under an even four minutes, or perhaps longer."

To "dress an act" means, in stage language, to set up the scenery and to wear certain costumes, in other words the external fittings that serve to make the act more or less spectacular.

Some acts are "dressed" very simply. That is, there may be only a simple room scene, with a table or chair. Then the actor depends on his action or his "lines" to make an impression on the public.

Another act may be a very showy one with elaborate fittings and expensive costumes, and in this case, as a rule, the acting proper and the lines are not of so much importance.

In Joe's case he had no "lines," or spoken words, to attract the attention of his audience. It is hard to make the voice carry in a big circus tent, and even an accomplished ring-master often fails in this respect. Of course in Joe's case he could not talk under water, and aside from the introduction on the part of Jim Tracy there were no "lines."

"But I have an idea," mused Joe, "that I could dress the act differently from Benny's performance. He had it a little too plain. I don't know just what I want, but it's got to be something different. I'm going to experiment."

Of course there was no time that day to make changes. Already it was nearly time for the parade to be formed on the circus grounds. Joe, as well as several of the other performers, did not go in the parade, for they had to get ready the special apparatus connected with their acts. In Joe's case, he had to look after his trapezes, and now, in addition, the tank, in order to make sure that all was in proper shape. Of course there were men whose duties were to see to these things for the performers, but Joe took no chances—he supervised everything himself very carefully, as did Tonzo and Sid Lascalla.

For when one's life depends on the strength of a wooden bar or on the firmness of a rope, it behooves one to look well to the apparatus.

In regard to the tank, of course, there was comparatively little danger, even should one of the glass sides break or a leak occur. The worst would be that the water would escape and the act be spoiled. But Joe did not want that to happen, so he carefully watched the men as they took out the parts of the tank and began fitting them together on the raised platform where Joe's act would occur.

A supply of white sand for the bottom of the tank was carried with the glass box. When the water was drained off it after the night performance, the sand was put in a box to be used over again.

Joe watched the men slip the big sheets of heavy plate glass into the metal holding strips at the corners of the tank and tighten up the rubber water-proof fittings. Then the sand was spread over the bottom, the steps, by which Joe reached a little platform on the edge of the water-filled tank, were put in place, and the act was nearly "set."

"Well, I guess I can't do much more with it now," thought Joe as he saw the tank completed. "I'd better see about my trapezes."

As he crossed to another part of the tent he saw Helen giving some orders about a few pieces of apparatus she used in her tricks with Rosebud.

"Well, Joe," asked the girl, "you haven't caught any more hippos, have you?"

"No, Helen, one a day is enough. How is everything with you?"

"All right. I'm going to give Rosebud his sugar."

"I'll walk along with you. I'm going to see about my trapezes."

"Oh, aren't you going to do the tank act? I thought I saw the men setting it up."

"You did. I'm going to do a double turn—at least for a while."

"Good luck to you!"

Joe's trapeze work was simpler now that he had added the underwater feature to his circus acts, and it did not take him long to see that the bars, ropes and rings were in perfect condition, all fastenings secure and made so they would not slip when the strain from a long swinging jump came on them.

Then, having a little time on his hands before he would have to go on for the afternoon show, Joe went in to town, to stroll about. The place was filled with country visitors who had come in to see the circus, this being the center of a thriving farming community. Joe, going into a drug store to get an ice cream soda, saw in the window of an establishment next door a large aquarium, in which goldfish were swimming about amid long, waving, green aquatic grass.

"There's my idea!" exclaimed Joe, aloud. "Or one of them, anyhow."

"Did you speak to me?" asked an old gentleman, who was just coming out of the drug store as Joe went in.

"No, sir. I beg your pardon. I just thought of something."

"Oh, I see," and with a smile the gentleman passed on, while Joe, still thinking deeply, went in to get his soda.

"Well?" asked the clerk, suggestively, as Joe paused at the marble fountain.

"I'll have a goldfish sundae," said Joe, reflectively.

"What? Say, come again, young fellow! This isn't a joke shop," and the clerk seemed rather angry.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Joe hastened to say. "I mean a chocolate nut sundae. I was thinking of goldfish—that's all."

"That's different," laughed the clerk. "I thought you were trying to jolly me with the name of a new drink."

And while Joe ate his cream his thoughts were busy with the idea which had suddenly come to him.

"I wonder if Jim Tracy will stand for it," he mused. "I've a good notion to do it without asking him. If he doesn't like it he can say so, and no great harm's done. I'll stand the expense myself. If I could get hold of the inheritance Bill Watson thinks ought to come to me through my mother, I'd pull off a still bigger stunt in this tank act. But I guess I'll never get any money from England."

So far Joe's efforts to prove that he was entitled to anything from his mother's estate had been unavailing.

"Yes," thought our hero, as he finished his cream and went out, stopping to look at the goldfish in the aquarium, "I'll do it and trust to luck."

Joe went into the store, which was a place where not only fish, but dogs, cats and birds were sold. He remained some little time in conversation with the proprietor, and some money changed hands. Joe was smiling when he came out.

"At least it will be different, whatever else it is," thought the boy fish, as he may now be called, for he was destined to be billed as that later on.

There was so much taking place in the big circus tent, or "main top" as it is called, that Joe's activities around the glass tank were hardly noticed. If any of the circus people saw him they probably believed he was just doing what Benny had often done, looking to see about the temperature of the water, and to be positive that the joints were not leaking.

And when, a little later, a circus attendant brought word to Joe that there was a man with a horse and wagon outside the tent who had a big box for Joe, even that caused no comment, for it was almost time for the show to start and every one was busy about his or her own

affairs or special act.

But when Jim Tracy passed the platform on which the tank was standing, and saw a big canvas cover wrapped about the sides of the glass box, he opened his eyes in surprise.

"What's the idea, Joe?" he asked.

"Oh, just a little experiment," was the answer.

"Experiment! You're not going to fall down on the act, are you? Remember we have it billed in this town, and we're likely to play to record-breaking audiences both this afternoon and evening. You're not going to cut out the act, are you, after promising——"

"Cut out the act? Of course not!"

"But putting that canvas around the tank makes it look as though it was out of business."

"Oh, it isn't out of business at all," said Joe with a laugh. "In fact I hope it will draw more business than before. Just leave it to me, Jim. It will be all right, I'm sure. You go ahead and make the usual announcement, only don't pull any four-minute immersion on me, for I'm not up to that yet. Make it three and a quarter if you like, I think I can hold my breath that long."

"But I don't quite see, Joe."

"You don't need to, now. I want to spring it on you, as well as on the public. Just give me a man to yank off the canvas cover when I say the word, and that'll be all I want."

"All right, Joe. It's your affair, as long as you do as we've advertised."

"I'll do that and more, Jim Tracy. Leave it to me."

Joe's trapeze work came first on the programme, and while he liked this as well as ever and did his usual hair-raising feats, this day he was a bit impatient for the act to be over, so he could do what he had planned in the tank.

At last, however, he made his final swing, and dropped down into the life net amid the plaudits of the crowd. Then Joe hurried to the dressing tent to get into Benny's scaly, green, rubber suit.

"That's another thing I'm going to do when I get around to it," thought Joe, as he squeezed himself into the garments. "I'm going to have another suit, different, and of another color. I've got to change this act about to bring it up to my ideas."

Out on the little platform at the edge of the tank, Joe took his place. Jim Tracy, standing near by on the ground, pointed up to the queerly-clad figure and made his usual dramatic announcement.

"And now," finished the ring-master, "the boy fish will show you that it is as easy for him to live, move and have his being under water, as it is for ordinary mortals in the atmosphere of this earth. Ready!"

"Ready!" cried Joe, and he nodded to the attendant who stood ready to pull a rope that would let fall from the tank the canvas that concealed it from view.

## CHAPTER IX

### A NEW STUNT

There was a hush of expectancy as Joe stood poised on the little platform above the tank. The band, that had blared out when Joe made his bow, had stopped playing, and the drummer was ready to sound a big "boom" on the bass instrument when Joe should plunge into the water.

The canvas came slithering down from around the sides of the glass tank, and at once there arose murmurs of admiration from the big crowd in the tent.

"How pretty!" women's voices said.

"Say, you did pull off something new!" murmured Jim Tracy, greatly pleased.

Joe had transformed the tank into a big aquarium. In the four corners were long, waving, green, aquatic plants, seemingly growing in the white sand.

The plants did not interfere with a view from all four sides through the transparent glass, but they added greatly to the effectiveness of the act. But, more than this, there were a score of large goldfishes swimming about in the tank, their brilliant scales reflecting back

the light that came in from top and sides.

"Why, they're real!"

"They're alive!"

"They're real fish!"

Thus murmured the crowd, and Joe smiled at the sensation he had caused. That had been the idea which had come to him as he saw the aquarium of fish as he was going in to get his ice cream. He had bought the fish from the dealer, as well as the long streamers of aquatic plants, and had placed them in his tank, few if any of the circus folk being aware of the surprise Joe was planning.

"That sure is great!" declared Jim, who was as much surprised as any one in the audience.

Joe waited a moment for the crowd to appreciate the novel and pretty little scenic background he had provided for his act. Then, having inflated his lungs with air, he plunged gracefully into the tank of water.

There was a rush of the real fish to one end as the boy fish came down among them, and the flitting, glittering, golden bodies could easily be seen as they darted to and fro in alarm when Joe settled down on the white, sandy bottom.

Then, prevented by the glass sides from getting too far away from the strange creature who seemed almost as much at home in the water as they were, the fish began swimming about in all directions.

This was just what Joe wanted, for he knew it added to the effectiveness of the act. He believed that the audience would be fascinated in seeing him through the glass, surrounded as he was by real, live, swimming fish.

Waiting a moment to let the golden creatures become quiet, Joe began his own swimming movements, turning, circling and somersaulting in the limpid element. He slowly waved his hands to and fro, pretending to be playing with the fish. Sometimes one or two of them would slip through his fingers, and he might have caught them, only he did not want to injure them.

Joe had bargained for the biggest goldfish he could buy, so they could easily be seen from even the far end of the tent. At night, when there was no sunlight to illuminate the scene, a big gasoline incandescent light overhead and smaller ones arranged like footlights on a stage, to shine up, would make the tank of water even more plainly visible and more brilliant than in the afternoon.

"I guess I didn't make any mistake in this experiment," thought Joe, as he looked out through the glass and saw the crowd applauding.

His swimming exhibition at an end, Joe came out to prepare for the second part of his act—the under-water endurance feat, during which he did several simple tricks.

"Though the fish swimming about may spoil some of the juggling," Joe mused. "I never thought of that. However, it may make the act take all the better if it's a bit funny."

As a matter of fact, it did.

Joe took a little longer than usual to inflate his lungs this time. He was going to try to remain under water longer than he had done on the other occasions.

The iron box of tricks was slowly lowered into the tank, for Joe did not want to frighten the fish any more than he could help. Then he got in himself, not diving this time, as he had found on the first dive that the fish were very much startled.

"And as long as they are my silent partners in this act I must treat 'em fairly," thought Joe, as he went under water.

He did a little juggling with the iron balls, and, just as he had half anticipated, a big goldfish swam between his hand and the ball once, just as he was about to catch it. He, therefore, failed to get the ball, and, taking advantage of the occasion, he pretended to get angry. He shook his fist at the fish, which, of course, darted away.

Joe's comical little caper begot a laugh, and he made a mental note to work in that feature at all the performances. The value of a laugh is appreciated even in a circus act.

As Joe went through the tricks, pretending to swallow an egg and making it come out of his ear, causing several small objects to disappear, and doing other tricks that he had learned while on the road with Professor Rosello, Joe thought of something else.

"I wonder how that would work," he mused, for he could think, if not talk, under water while holding his breath. As a matter of fact active thinking did not make the time seem so long as when his attention was fixed on the number of minutes he was trying to stay under.

"I must see if I can't work out something like that," Joe continued to muse. "It ought to go well. I'd have to have some apparatus made for it, though. Well, one thing at a time. I'll stick to the fish stunt for a while yet."

Joe's head was beginning to throb now, caused by the continued water pressure and by the retention of his breath. He felt that he would soon have to go up to breathe.

"But I'll try to beat my own record, though it isn't much to boast of as yet," he decided.

He finished his tricks, and then, stretching and yawning, which always called forth a laugh, he straightened out on the white sand and pretended to go to sleep while the goldfish swam above him.

It made a pretty and effective scene, and the audience applauded well.

Joe was nearly at his limit of endurance, though he was not in such physical distress as he had been when first doing the act. He decided that he must come up, so, pretending to awaken, and to be extremely surprised at finding himself in a tank of water, with fish for companions, Joe slowly floated to the surface.

"Three minutes and twenty seconds!" announced Jim Tracy, who stood with his watch in his hand. "As I told you, friends, the boy fish has remained under water, not three minutes and a quarter, as I predicted he would, but five seconds longer. And let me tell you, my friends, five seconds is a long time—under water."

The crowd applauded again as Joe came out of the tank and bowed while he wrapped a bath robe about him to hurry to his dressing tent.

"Oh, Joe! It was fine!" cried Helen, as he passed her when she was getting ready to go into the ring with Rosebud. "It was so pretty! How did you ever think of it?"

"Oh, it was just accident, I guess."

"A lucky accident. We other performers will have to dress our acts differently if we want to get any attention."

Joe's act was better that night than it had been in the afternoon. One of the circus men caught a big mud turtle in the creek, near which the tents were erected, and finding it was not of the biting kind, Joe put it in the tank with the goldfish. That added to the effectiveness of the scene at night.

"Say, what are you going to do with these fish?" asked an attendant as he was about to empty Joe's tank after the night performance in order to pack it for transportation.

"I arranged with the aquarium man to buy them back at a reduction," said Joe. "I don't suppose we can transport them very well, but I'll keep the green plants. They'll live a long while and I like them in the tank. The man who brought the fish also brought a small net to lift 'em out with. It ought to be around here somewhere. Put the fish in the box they came in, fill it with water and I'll send 'em back."

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" broke in Jim Tracy.

"Why not?" asked Joe, somewhat surprised.

"Because those goldfish are going to travel with you. They're a part of the regular act after this, and don't you forget it! It went too well to give up. We can carry goldfish as easily as a hippopotamus, I reckon. Put 'em in some kind of a water-tight box, and we'll ship 'em in the hippo tank, where he can't nose 'em out. I'll have a regular traveling tank made for 'em later. Leave those fish behind? I guess not! They're too good for that. Take 'em with you, Joe."

The boy fish was only too glad to do this. He had not hoped to have this part of the act permanently, as he did not see how it was possible to get a fresh supply of goldfish in each town where they played. But taking the fish with them solved the problem.

The golden swimmers were put in the box in which they had been brought to the circus grounds from the animal store, and when water was added they swam about, seemingly in comfort, though their quarters were rather crowded.

Joe put in some of the green aquatic plant, as this serves to keep the fish healthy, and makes it unnecessary to change the water so often.

"But they'll have to have a fresh drink as soon as we arrive in the morning," Joe said.

"I'll look after them," promised the keeper of the hippopotamus, who was grateful to Joe for having stopped the big beast from running into danger.

Thus Joe's act was added to. But he was not done yet—not satisfied. He wanted something different.

For a week the show traveled on. Joe and Helen wrote to Benny, and in reply received a

short letter from him. He said they were getting ready to operate on him, though they would have to wait for a favorable opportunity.

"It is the only chance, they say," wrote Benny, "of preventing me from becoming deaf and dumb. But oh, how I dread it! And my mother!—I don't know how to tell her."

"Poor boy!" murmured Helen. "He certainly is in trouble. I wish we could be with him—but we can't."

For the show must go on, and Joe and Helen had to go with it.

Joe's act in the tank made a favorable impression all along the route. He was gaining a reputation, and Jim Tracy ordered some new show bills featuring him. Joe also bought a new suit, red and in some other respects different from Benny's old one.

"Oh, what a pretty color!" Helen exclaimed when she saw Joe's new under-water suit. "It just matches the goldfish."

"So it does," Joe agreed. "I never thought of that when I sent for it."

It did make an effective picture in the tank, and at first glance Joe appeared to be a big goldfish himself, so perfect was the coloring of his rubber garment.

One day, following the afternoon performance, Joe, having finished his act, was watching the antics of some performing dogs that had lately been added to the circus. One dog made a jump from a high pole into a blanket held by four men.

"Another idea!" Joe exclaimed as he watched. "I'll have a new stunt if they'll only let me do it. I wonder if it would work. I'm going to try. It will be even better than the goldfish act!"

## **CHAPTER X**

### **IN TERROR**

When the afternoon performance was over, Joe found a chance to speak to Mr. Fleet, the man who owned the performing dogs.

"Pretty good act you have there," said the boy fish. He sat down and began petting one of the dogs.

"Glad you think so," was the answer. "You have some little act yourself. Strong, I believe your name is?"

"Yes," Joe nodded in friendly fashion. "I guess my act does go pretty well, but it's more because of the novelty of it than from anything I do. It's different from trapeze work."

"It certainly is. I don't see how you hold your breath so long."

"Practice," said Joe. "But if I just stayed under water I wouldn't be able to hold the attention of the crowd long. I have to work in some special stunts."

"So I noticed. That goldfish idea is a good one."

"And that brings me to what I want to say to you," Joe said. "I have a new idea. You know, we've got to be always on the lookout for something new." Mr. Fleet nodded in comprehension. "Now it occurred to me while I was looking at your jumping dog," went on Joe, "that perhaps I could use him in my act—with you to help, of course."

"I'd be very glad to do anything I could," returned Mr. Fleet. He had soon become aware of the popularity of Joe's act, and as trained dogs are not much of a novelty he welcomed the opportunity of increasing attention to his particular act. To be associated with the boy fish would be well worth while.

"What is your idea?" asked the dog trainer.

"This," said Joe. "I want to get something alive in the tank with me—something bigger than the goldfish and the turtle. Of course the fish look pretty, and I shall probably keep them, but they don't show off well enough, especially at the far end of the tent. People can't see them well—I mean as well as I'd like to have them."

"And you have an idea that you can take one of my dogs into the tank with you?"

"Well, yes, that's what I've been thinking of," answered Joe. "Now take the one that jumps off the pole. He seems to have a lot of nerve."

"He has. That dog is a wonder, but I had my own troubles training him. However, I don't



understand just what you mean."

"This," said Joe. "After you have put your dogs through their paces, and I have done most of my act, why can't we have the jumping dog leap into the tank, where I'm under the water?"

"We might be able to get him to do it," assented the trainer, slowly considering the matter. "But he wouldn't stay under water with you."

"No, I don't suppose he would at first, certainly not very long at a time," Joe said. "But he could be taught to. An animal, I think, instinctively holds its breath under water. It doesn't try to breathe, as a human being does who falls in for the first time. Of course a dog, or any other animal, instinctively comes to the top as soon as it can after finding itself under the water. But your dog is so smart we might be able to teach it to swim under water, for say a minute at a time."

"Well, perhaps we might," assented Mr. Fleet. "Toto is very quick to learn, and I suppose staying under water for a little while wouldn't be any harder for him to accomplish than some of the tricks I've made him do. But wouldn't it rather detract from you to have a dog sharing in the applause?"

"I don't think so," replied Joe. "If we get Toto to stay under a minute we'll be doing well, and we may have to cut it to a half. But if I stay under more than three minutes it will give the public a good idea of how much more endurance a human being has than an animal. That's only an idea of mine, of course. I don't know that we could make it work, but I feel like trying it."

"Well, I'm willing, if you are," assented Mr. Fleet. "We'll give it a trial, anyhow. We can do it now, if you like."

"We'll try the preliminaries," said Joe. "That is, we'll try to get him to jump into the tank of water first, so he'll get used to that. The rest will come gradually."

"Come on, Toto!" called Mr. Fleet, and the intelligent animal started up from his master's feet. "A new trick, old boy," went on the trainer. Toto barked in anticipation.

"Toto is a very willing worker," said the trainer. "He seems to love trying something new. If any of my dogs, or any dog in fact, can do what you want, Toto is the boy!"

The big tent was practically deserted save for a few attendants who were putting apparatus in shape for the evening performance. The high pole from which Toto jumped was on a movable platform, and with the help of some ring-men Joe and Mr. Fleet transported it over close to the tank which was left filled with water ready for Joe's evening act.

"Hadn't you better take out the goldfish?" asked Mr. Fleet. "Some of them may be hurt if Toto jumps in."

"No, I think not," said Joe. "The tank is big enough for them to swim out of the way, and if the trick goes I'll want the dog used to the fish in the water, so he might as well begin with them."

"Yes," assented the trainer. "I don't suppose you'd dare use a cat in an act like this, even if you could get her to go into the water, which most cats hate. She'd eat the goldfish."

"I'm afraid so!" laughed Joe. "But say! that would be a stunt, wouldn't it? A diving cat! That would create a sensation, but I guess it couldn't be done. I've heard of diving horses and diving bears, but never of a diving cat. Well, we won't bother about that now."

The pole was in place near the tank, the top being reached by a rope ladder up which Toto climbed. On top of the pole was a small padded platform for the dog to rest on before he got the word to make the leap.

"Up, Toto!" ordered Mr. Fleet, and with a bark the dog started up the ladder. Reaching the platform, he sat there in a "begging position," waiting for the sign to jump.

"Down, Toto!" called Mr. Fleet, but instead of jumping, as he had always done at the word, Toto only whined and moved about uneasily on the little platform.

"Come on! Come on!" cried the trainer, but the little dog would not.

"He's afraid of the water," said Joe. "He's used to seeing a blanket under him."

"I guess that's right," agreed the trainer.

"Well, let's hold a blanket over the tank," suggested Joe. "We can hold it high enough at first so it won't touch the surface of the water. Gradually we can lower it until we have a little water showing as it seeps through the blanket. In that way perhaps we can get him used to it."

"We'll try that," assented Mr. Fleet. Four men held a blanket which was stretched over the top of the tank of water.

"Down, Toto!" commanded his master, and down the little dog jumped with a bark of satisfaction.

"That's our plan!" cried Joe.

They kept on with the experiment until they had the dog leaping into the blanket as it sagged down in the water, a quantity of which was held in the depression of the cloth. Toto seemed to like the new trick. He was eager for the leap, and splashed about joyously in the water.

An hour's practice was considered enough for one day.

"To-morrow we'll go at it again," said Mr. Fleet.

The more Joe thought of the new trick the better he liked it.

"To work with a diving dog will surely create a sensation," he mused.

"What's this I hear about you, Joe?" asked Jim Tracy at the evening performance. "Trying some new stunt?"

"Well, yes, just trying it. You mean about the dog?"

"Yes."

"I don't know that we can work it," went on Joe; "but if we can it ought to make a hit."

"That's the idea!" said the ring-master. "We've got to keep working for new hits in the circus business all the while."

For several days after that, whenever opportunity offered, Joe and Mr. Fleet put Toto through the jumping rehearsal, using the blanket. Finally, when they thought the dog would no longer be afraid, they took it away. But at first Toto refused to jump, and his master would not, of course, use force.

Finally, however, patience won, and when another dog, a little water spaniel, was put in the tank Toto seemed to think it was all right, and made his first leap from the high platform into the tank where the goldfish flitted about.

"Hurrah!" cried Joe, as the water splashed up, and the little dog swam to the edge of the tank to be lifted out by his master. "Hurrah! We'll have a diving dog yet!"

"But I'm afraid it will be some time before you can get him to stay under water as long as you do," said Mr. Fleet.

However, the first part was accomplished, and for several days after that Toto was given frequent practice in jumping into the tank, Joe not having yet taken his place beneath the surface.

Then one afternoon, when it was thought that Toto had lost all fear of the water, since he did the trick as naturally as he did some of his older ones, Joe got in the tank, and Mr. Fleet called to the dog to jump.

But the little animal flatly refused to leave the platform. No urging or coaxing could make it take the jump. Whether the sight of Joe in the tank frightened Toto, or whether the form of the boy fish was unduly magnified to the dog because of the fact that Joe was under the surface, could only be guessed at. The fact remained that Toto refused to jump, though when Joe climbed dripping out the dog quickly jumped in.

"Now, what do you think of that!" exclaimed Mr. Fleet. "Well, I've been up against just as queer things in a different way when training other dogs. You'll get them to the point of doing a trick, and maybe because a new kind of fly buzzes around their ears they balk. But we won't give up."

"Maybe it we try it when the tent is crowded, and the music is playing, it will be different," suggested Joe. "Let's do it."

"But if he balks in public it will spoil the act," suggested Mr. Fleet, "and we don't want that to happen. We'll keep on practising in private."

And so they did, but Toto refused to make the jump while Joe was in the tank, and the boy fish had about concluded to give up the trick and think of something else.

"Though I do want to do it," he said. "Maybe we could break in another dog."

"I haven't another one who will jump as fearlessly as Toto does," objected the trainer. "No, we'll have to stick to him."

The circus reached a town where a two days' stay was to be made. There was a good attendance the first day, and as the weather was fine the circus folk were in high spirits, for a combination of good weather and good crowds is the best thing in the world for a circus.

Joe, musing on some way of making Toto do the jumping trick, had gone into the animal tent a few minutes before the close of the afternoon performance. His act had been unusually successful, but he was still impressed with the idea that he must make it more novel. He and Mr. Fleet had arranged to give Toto another trial when the crowd should have departed, and Joe had come to the animal tent to talk to the dog trainer.

The chariot races were over, the "grand concert" had been given, and now the crowd began to file out of the big tent. Some, especially those with children, were coming back into the animal tent for another look at the elephants, camels, lions, tigers and other beasts, but most of the audience was satisfied with the view they had had in passing through to the "main top."

"What's the matter, Señor Bogardi?" asked Joe, as he saw the lion tamer with an anxious look in his face, standing near a cage which was covered with canvas. "More trouble?"

"Yes, friend Strong, more trouble," replied the man who went into their cages and put the lions through their several tricks. "This time it is Prince."

"The big Barbary lion?"

"Yes. Ever since we had to shoot his mate, Princess, he has not been like himself. To-day he began throwing himself with all his force against the iron door. He even started some of the bars, so I had to screen him from the public to quiet him."

"Did it?"

"Yes, he seems to be more tractable now. But I want to see if I can not take off the canvas. The public does not like it that they do not see all the animals. I hope Prince is not going on a rampage as Princess did."

Joe recalled the time when, by quick action, he had prevented the lioness from escaping. She had been shot later, while he was in the hospital recovering from the effects of a fall from his trapeze. Now her mate was making trouble.

"Softly now, Prince! Softly," began the lion tamer, as he removed the canvas cover. "Softly now, old boy!"

But no sooner was the cover off than the lion, which had been lying down, jumped up with a roar and dashed himself against the iron door of his cage.

Women in the crowd screamed with terror, and there was a rush to get out of the tent.

"There is no danger!" Señor Bogardi assured the people. But they thought it safer outside, and the rush for the exit continued.

The lion kept on throwing himself against the door, as though trying to break out.

"We must put the canvas back!" cried the tamer.

"I'll help," offered Joe.

But, even as he spoke, the lion with one last, desperate leap gave a bound against the side of the cage that almost overturned it. Then, with a rending of wood and a snapping of metal, the door of the cage sprang open, and the lion was loose in the tent.

## CHAPTER XI

### TOTO'S DISCOVERY

Fortunate it was that the circus was over for the afternoon and that the small crowd of spectators in the animal tent had rushed out before the lion broke loose, or there might have been a panic in which many might have been hurt, if not killed. Not necessarily by the lion, but by being trampled on by the feet of hundreds. For it is seldom that a wild beast kills when it first breaks out of a cage. It is too dazed by its sudden freedom, and often too frightened to want to do anything except run and hide.

Not that an escaped wild beast would not kill afterward if cornered, but it is seldom that one seeks blood when first it breaks out.

Mingled with the screams of frightened women and children, now safely outside the tent, and the hoarse cries of the men spectators, also in the open, were the yells of the circus people.

"A lion is loose!" was the warning that echoed through the animal tent. This was to let other circus folk know, so they might prepare to meet the danger.

Señor Bogardi drew his revolver and fired several shots in the air, hoping to frighten Prince and make him cower in some corner, whence he might be driven into another cage.

But the shots seemed only to frighten the lion into further action. Joe had a glimpse of the tawny form, with switching tail, dodging under the other animal cages which were drawn up in a circle around the tent.

"He's headed for the 'main-top' all right!" shouted some one, as he saw Prince running toward the passage which connected the two tents.

"Come on! We must catch him!" exclaimed the tamer. "If he gets loose it will be a great loss!"

"More than a loss. I guess, if he has his appetite with him," mused Joe. "I wonder how they'll catch him."

He had heard circus stories of wild animals escaping and being secured again, sometimes days later, but aside from his experience with the hippopotamus Joe had seen nothing of this kind.

The animal tent was now a place of wild confusion. Men were rushing here and there, to arm themselves with tent pegs, stakes—anything they could grab up. They were alive to the danger, but they did not shirk. The elephants were trumpeting loudly, and some were tugging at their foot chains attached to stakes driven in the ground. The big beasts knew something was wrong.

Monkeys in a cage next to the broken one from which the lion had escaped were wildly leaping about and chattering. They had caught sight of the tawny beast, and knew him for one of their jungle foes, though there was little danger now that the simians would be injured.

The Siberian tigers were spitting and snarling in their cage, and another lion began to roar till he seemed to shake the ground. All the captive animals appeared to know that one of their number had gained its freedom and it was as if they were eager to congratulate him.

"Keep the crowd out! Don't let 'em in here!" cried Jim Tracy, as he came running in, word having reached him of what had happened.

"No danger of any of that crowd coming in," said Joe, as he nodded toward the throng that had passed out of the tent. "You couldn't drag 'em in."

"Come on, boys!" called Señor Bogardi. "We must get him before he runs out of the big tent."

He led the throng of animal men and others in the chase. The men carried ropes, sharp iron prongs and other weapons, while the lion-tamer had sent to the cook wagons for a big chunk of raw beef with which to placate Prince, in case he should come close enough.

And then, in the big tent, there began a lion hunt. The place was cleared of spectators now, but there were many nooks under the thousands of seats or behind some of the apparatus that was left in place for the evening performance, where a beast could hide.

The lion had disappeared. Under the direction of Jim Tracy and the beast's tamer the big tent was gone thoroughly over but no lion could be found.

"He must have gotten out," declared Joe.

"If he has there'll be trouble—not now maybe, but later," said the ring-master.

"We can't move on and leave him behind very well," he went on. "Prince will probably go into hiding until he gets up an appetite, and then we'll have bills of damages to settle from farmers whose calves and sheep are disappearing. I almost wish we didn't have any cats in the show, but I s'pose we must."

The search went on in the tent, but was unavailing. Prince seemed to have run in and run out again, though the circus folk and others on the outside of the tent, on being questioned, said they had seen nothing of the beast.

"Well, we've got to find him, that's all," decided Jim, "and before dark if we can. Get a crowd of men, Bogardi, and start out and see what you can do."

The lion tamer picked some men who were used to handling animals, and set off with them. A spare cage was made ready to rush to the scene as soon as word of the finding of Prince should come in.

Meanwhile there was nothing for the others to do save wait, and nervous waiting it was. Not that the circus could not go on without the lion, but people would not be very likely to come to the evening performance when they knew a savage lion was loose in the neighborhood. They would prefer to remain in their homes.

There, too, was the trouble that would be caused if some one were injured or killed by the

beast.

"It sure is tough luck!" complained Jim Tracy.

"Sure is," agreed Joe.

Gradually matters quieted down in the animal tent, and while some of the performers went to supper Joe spoke to Mr. Fleet about giving Toto another trial at the water jump.

"We've got to go on with the show, lion or no lion," said Joe, "and we might as well practise that act."

The dog trainer agreed with him, and they brought in Toto.

"Now, Toto," said his master, "be nice, and do what we want you to. Up you go."

He had the little dog in his arms and was walking toward the platform on which Joe's tank stood. But Toto acted very strangely. He trembled and whined, and seemed to want to get out of Mr. Fleet's arms.

"Why, why now! Steady!" murmured the trainer soothingly. "What's the matter, Toto?"

The dog continued to whine, and exhibited signs of fear.

"Why now, little doggie," said Joe, "you won't have to do that jump if you don't want to. Come on now, jump into the tank. I'll stay out if you won't jump with me in at first."

Mr. Fleet put Toto down at the foot of the rope ladder which led to the top of the pole.

"Up you go!" he said.

But, instead, Toto, with whines and barks, jumped to the ground. Then, running away a short distance, the little dog turned and stood facing the platform of the tank. Toto growled and barked, and the hair on his spine stood up in a straight ridge.

The platform was hollow. It consisted of four uprights, and around them was a heavy and stiff piece of canvas, painted to resemble a mass of rock. On top of this seeming rock pile stood the glass tank.

"Why, Toto, what in the world is the matter?" asked Mr. Fleet.

Joe had a sudden idea.

"It's something—something under the platform," he said.

He and Mr. Fleet looked at each other. The same thought came to them both.

"The lion!"

Toto continued to bark and growl and to face the canvas-enclosed platform.

"Prince must be under there," said Joe.

"Yes," nodded the dog-trainer. "What had we better do?"

"Take your dog away, keep quiet, and one of us go and tell Jim Tracy," decided Joe. "One of us must stay and watch to see that the lion does not come out. I'll stay."

"Perhaps I'd better stay," suggested Mr. Fleet. "I'm used to handling animals, and once I trained some pumas—treacherous beasts they were, too. You go and tell Jim."

This seemed to be the best plan, though Joe would willingly have stayed. It was not a question of bravery, but of expediency. If the lion did come out the dog-trainer could probably hold it back better than Joe could.

"The lion under your tank!" cried the ring-master. "Great Scott! I never thought of looking under there. We'll get him out right away. Say, it's a relief to know where he is!"

## CHAPTER XII

### MORE MONEY

The animal men who had not gone out with Señor Bogardi to search through the town were hurriedly summoned. The spare cage was wheeled in and arrangements made to again put Prince into captivity. "Is he there yet?" asked the ring-master, as he came up to where Mr. Fleet stood.

"Yes. He hasn't made a move or sign. Of course we're only guessing—Joe and I—that he's under there. It was Toto's actions that gave us the idea."

"Oh, I guess he's there, all right—the dog ought to know," said Jim Tracy. "He picked out the best hiding place in the whole tent. I guess it looked sort of like home to him."

Indeed the space under the tank platform, with its canvas covering painted to resemble rocks, made an ideal hiding place. A lion, or any other beast of his size, could crawl under the flexible cloth which would fall into place without disclosing that it had been disturbed. And, too, Barbary lions have their dens in holes in the rocks, and poor Prince may have fancied he was back in his old home again.

"We'll make sure he's there before we try to drive him out," said Jim. With a long prodding rod he lifted one end of the canvas. At once there sounded a menacing growl, and some of the men moved back.

"He's there all right," the ring-master announced. "Now to get him out. Bring up some of those tubs."

He pointed to some of the heavy wooden affairs used in elephant tricks, and the men rolled them around three sides of the platform. Then they braced them with boards so the sudden rush of the lion would not knock them over.

"Now bring up the cage!" ordered Tracy. It was on wheels, one of the regular wagon affairs, and the spring door was braced open, with a man ready to snap it shut as soon as Prince should be inside. A big piece of raw beef was thrown inside the cage as a bait.

"Now then, Joe, I'm afraid we'll have to spoil some of your ornamentation," said the ring-master grimly. "I'm going to slit down one side of the canvas, but we'll have it fixed for you again. I want a good opening for Prince to run out through when we start him going."

A quick motion of a keen knife, and one side of the canvas fell away. There was another menacing growl and then, in a far corner of the hiding place he had chosen, Prince was seen curled up in a most comfortable fashion.

"The rascal!" said Jim Tracy. "Come out of that. Get behind him, some of you men, and prod him with the irons. Be easy, we don't want him to go on another rampage."

Reaching under the canvas, the men, with prodding irons, poked away until they touched the crouching body of the lion. With a roar Prince sprang up. He saw light only in one direction, where the canvas had been cut. He started toward that, caught a glimpse of the barred cage and hesitated. Then there came to him the odor of the meat, and he could not resist. Prince had had enough of liberty. With slow steps he went into the cage, gave one roar, and began to eat. The door was snapped shut and Prince was caught.

"Good work!" exclaimed the ring-master in relieved tones. "Now we can go on with the show."

Messengers were sent to recall the other lion-hunters, and great precautions were taken to see that this second cage was secure. Prince seemed to have calmed down after his brief freedom.

"We've got to let the public know that the lion is caught," decided Jim Tracy. "Otherwise we'll be playing to empty benches to-night, and that won't do."

Accordingly men were sent out to spread the report that the beast was captured, and could be safely viewed behind strong bars at the circus that night. When Señor Bogardi came back, glad indeed to find that his lion was safe, he said Prince was much quieter and need not be concealed behind canvas, for the present at least.

Joe's stand was temporarily repaired and he made ready for the evening performance.

"I guess we'll let the dog trick go for a while," he said to Mr. Fleet. "Probably it will be hard to get Toto near the platform for a few days, until he can no longer notice the lion smell."

The dog-trainer agreed with him. Wild beasts, even in captivity, give out a strong odor, and it was this that had given the little dog the information that some jungle creature was underneath the canvas covering.

The efforts of Joe and Mr. Fleet to make Toto dive into the tank while the boy fish was in it, were totally unavailing, even some days after the lion episode. Toto would dive in when only the goldfish were there, but the minute Joe entered the little beast refused to jump. It was not that Toto was not friendly with Joe, either, for he would let the youth pet him, and was very fond of him. It was one of those things which cannot be explained, and there was no use trying to get Toto to do the trick as Joe wanted it done.

"Well, if I have to give that up I'll work out something else," our hero decided. And, as the show traveled on from place to place, Joe perfected himself in aquatic work.

He was getting accustomed to staying under the water, increasing the time of submersion a

few seconds each day, and he did not doubt but he could make a record of four minutes in the course of a month or two. His lung power was increasing.

From Professor Rosello he had received a pack of celluloid playing cards, and Joe now added to his tricks some sleight-of-hand work with the Kings, Queens and other cards. It took well with the audience, but Joe was not satisfied. He wanted something more spectacular.

Meanwhile Joe was doing less trapeze work in order to give more attention to the tank. In private he practised picking up coins in his mouth, as Benny had done. At first it was hard work, and more than once Joe swallowed so much water that he had to come up to the surface. But he did not stop on that account.

He still continued to use the goldfish, but the turtle died from some undiscoverable cause. Señorita Tanlozo, the snake charmer, offered to let Joe take one of her water anacondas into the tank with him.

"No, thank you," the boy fish said with a laugh and a shake of his head. "It may be all right, but I'd be so busy watching him, to see that he did not make a necklace of himself around my throat, that I couldn't do my acts. I'll just work with the fishes for a while."

Gradually Joe found that he could gather up almost as many coins as Benny had in his best day. Joe had acquired the knack of opening his mouth under water without swallowing any of the liquid. Then came an idea for varying the trick.

"Picking up the coins doesn't show off very well," he decided. "I ought to have something larger. And yet I can't get so many of them in my mouth. I have it—I'll eat under water! I wonder if it can be done."

After some experiments—not all of which were pleasant ones—Joe found that bananas were easier to handle and eat while under water than any other food; and, moreover, the moisture did not spoil them.

So one day he added to his stock of tricks that of eating a banana while submerged. Some persons were skeptical as to whether or not he really did swallow the fruit, thinking it might be sleight-of-hand work. But Joe invited a committee to search him and the tank for any trace of the fruit or of a hiding place, and he proved that he really did swallow the banana under water. It was not easy, but he soon became used to it.

Then he elaborated the trick a little. He had a sheet iron table made, and this was lowered to him after he entered the tank. On the table were plates, a cup and saucer, a knife, a fork and a spoon. It was a complete table set under water.

For food Joe used bananas cut into different shapes. He swallowed them, cutting them with his knife, feeding himself with his fork and pretending to drink from the cup. That of course was pretense.

Then he did his "sleep act" and came up to receive merited applause. Joe was certainly highly successful in his tank work. He had lengthened the whole act by several minutes, and he was nearer than ever to remaining under the full four minutes.

Another performer had been secured in his place to act with the Lascalla Brothers, but Joe did his lone trapeze work with the same satisfactory results as before.

Finally, the young performer decided to take a step he had contemplated for some time.

"Look here, Mr. Tracy," he said one afternoon, after the big crowd that had applauded our hero had filed out, "don't you think I ought to be getting more money?"

"More money!" repeated the ring-master. "What for?"

"Well, I'm doing a double turn. I do almost as much trapeze work as I did at first, and I'm putting on the tank act too. I've made that longer than Benny did. I really think I ought to be getting more money."

"You get a pretty good salary now, Joe. You've had several increases since you joined the show."

"I know I have, Mr. Tracy. But I want more now. Why, you bill my act big!"

"Oh, I know it. It's a good act, Joe."

"Then give me more money! I've just got to have it!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### ILL FEELING

The ring-master looked critically at the boy fish, but Joe returned the gaze steadily. He seemed very much in earnest.

"Say, Joe," asked Jim Tracy teasingly, "you're not going to get married, are you, that you want more money?"

Joe blushed and answered:

"No, not just yet, though I suppose you do pay the married men more than the single ones."

"Yes, that's the general custom. But if we practically doubled your salary, Joe, you'd be getting more than some of the married men."

"Well, I'm doing a double turn, Mr. Tracy. You've got to think of that."

The ring-master scratched his head. Clearly Joe had the best of the argument there.

"Well, I guess you're right," Jim Tracy was forced to admit.

"Then you'll give me more money?" Joe's voice was eager.

"I'll take it up with the treasurer, Joe," answered his friend. "You know this circus is a partnership affair, and I can't act alone. But I'll do the best I can for you."

It was a day or so later that Joe again brought up the subject. It was after a particularly successful performance, where Joe had been loudly applauded for staying under water within a few seconds of four minutes.

"Now's a good time to strike again for my increase," thought the boy fish. He approached Jim.

"How about more money for me?" Joe asked. "Do I get it?"

"Yes, we have decided to give it to you," was the ring-master's answer. "But I can't imagine what a boy like you—for you are only a boy—can want of so much money."

"Oh, I have a very good use for it," replied Joe coolly. "Thanks, Mr. Tracy."

"Oh, you're welcome, Joe. And I want you to feel that we are glad to pay you well, for you are a drawing card for the show. Only don't waste your money. The time to save is when you're young. I only wish I'd done so."

Joe smiled at this good advice, but he did not say whether or not he was going to follow it. He was pleased when, on the next pay day, he received an envelope with nearly twice as much in it as he had been in the habit of getting.

"It's a good thing I got up spunk to ask for it," mused Joe. "I guess I didn't do so badly when I ran away from the deacon's."

Joe thought back to the time when he had first made the acquaintance of Professor Rosello, the magician, rescuing him at the fireworks explosion. From then on Joe's rise had been steady until now he was earning a salary many a mature man would be glad to receive.

"It may seem a funny way to make a living, turning somersaults in the air, and seeing how long I can stay under water," mused Joe, "but it brings in the money, and that's what counts."

Joe was quite disappointed at the failure to get the diving dog worked into his act. He knew the necessity for something novel from time to time in performances destined to please the public, and he saw, all about him, men and women connected with the circus always striving to get some new effect, or do an old act in a new way.

The clowns were particularly anxious in this respect, for the public tires of nothing so quickly as of something funny. A thing may beget a laugh the first time, and even up to the fourth or fifth time, and then the cry is:

"Give us something new!"

The clowns knew this, and, from the veteran Bill Watson to the newest member of the staff, they were continually cudgeling their brains for novelty. All were afraid lest some fellow-clown steal their ideas; consequently they each worked on them in secret until he had them perfected and ready to give to the public. After that, of course no clown would be allowed to do what another offered for the amusement of the audiences.

Sometimes the simplest thing was made the basis for a funny act. Bill Watson could come out, attired in a suit half black and half white with his face tinted to match, and by going through the motions of a baseball player in his own inimitable way, raise a gale of laughter.

Some of the other clowns would go through the pretense of eating a meal, some one would pretend to go sailing in a soap box, while one team would do a "barber act." Each act was good and funny because of the peculiar way it was done.



So, seeing this spirit all about him, Joe was sorry he had not been able to add something new to his act. Of course, the goldfish had added greatly to it since Benny had been forced to give up his performance.

It did not seem likely that Benny Turton would take up his act again for some time, as a report received from the hospital said that a delicate and dangerous operation would have to be performed if he was to hear and speak again. Therefore, as the days went by, Joe kept his eyes open for a chance to supplement his tank act. There was not much he could do that was new or different in his trapeze work, though he still kept himself in the van of the profession and did as many hair-raising feats as before. He performed on the trapeze alone now, having dropped his act with the Lascalla Brothers because he could not fit it in with the water work. With this Joe was well pleased; for while the Spaniards worked well with him, Joe could not help feeling that they did not like him for having taken the place of Sim Doble, who had been discharged.

"Well, Joe, I hear you're pulling down a pretty good salary now," remarked Tonzo Lascalla to our hero one day.

"Who told you?" asked Joe, for he had not mentioned the increase to any one but Helen, and she had said she would not tell.

"Oh, those things are soon known in the circus," explained the Spaniard. "We're glad to hear about your good luck though. What do you say to a little celebration in town? We're going to lay over here Sunday."

"What do you mean?" asked Joe.

"I mean why don't you 'blow yourself,' as the boys say over here. Give a sort of supper to the crowd."

"I'm afraid I can't afford it," replied Joe, with a shake of his head. "I'd like to, but it would take a good deal more salary than I'm getting to entertain the circus."

"Oh, I didn't mean the whole outfit," said Tonzo. "I mean just thirty or forty of those you know best."

Joe shook his head.

"I can't afford it," he replied.

"What! With the money you're getting? Why, I hear you've had your salary nearly doubled!"

"Well, I'm doing double work, am I not?" asked Joe.

"Of course you are, but——"

Tonzo shook his head, and there was an unpleasant sneer on his face as he turned away from Joe.

A little later Joe saw Tonzo and Sid talking together. He could not help hearing what they said, as they were in their dressing room, while he was in his, putting on the red, scaly suit which he wore in the tank.

"Will he do it?" asked Sid of Tonzo.

"No. He claims he can't afford it."

"And getting nearly twice as much as we do! Say, he must be a regular tight-wad!"

"That's what he is," said Tonzo bitterly. "Afraid to spend his money!"

The words stung Joe. He paused in his dressing.

"Tight-wad?" he mused. "So that's what they call me. Well, it isn't a very nice name, but if they think I'm going to spend my money on blow-outs for the crowd they're mistaken. I'm not going to be so foolish."

Joe knew that Tonzo had not proposed dissipation, for circus performers, particularly those who take their lives in their hands on high trapezes, cannot afford to live a riotous life, even for one night. Their nerves would be shattered for days to come, and once a performer's nerve is gone he is useless to himself and to others. But Joe was not going to waste his money on even an ordinary supper for the crowd.

"But I sure do hate to be called a tight-wad," he mused, "especially when I don't deserve it."

However, he seemed to have acquired that reputation unwittingly. Several times after that he heard sneering remarks directed toward himself, and once or twice some laughing reference was made to the "blow-out" he was going to give.

Joe flushed at these slurs, but he did not give in.

## CHAPTER XIV

### HELEN IS WORRIED

Joe Strong stood in a secluded part of the circus lot early one morning before breakfast. The show had reached the place only a little while before, there having been a delay because of a slight accident. Most of the performers, with increased appetites, were wending their way to the dining tents, but Joe, with coat and vest off, with shoulders thrown back and head held high in the air, was taking in long breaths and expelling them again to the utmost capacity of his lungs.

"What in the world are you doing, Joe?" asked Helen, who was on her way to breakfast. "Are you trying to rival Mr. Jefferson when he breaks a chain on his chest?" for this was one of the feats of the strong man.

"Hardly that," laughed Joe, as he let out a long breath.

"Then what are you doing?"

"Practising deep breathing for my tank work. I'm going to try for the four-minute record today."

"Are you really?" Helen was much interested.

"I don't say I'm going to do it," went on Joe, for he was anything but boastful. "But this seems a good day to make the attempt. It's clear and crisp after the rain, and I seem to be able to hold my breath longer on a day like this than when it's warm and muggy. So I thought I'd get in a little early practice before I got too loggy with a big breakfast."

"A good idea," Helen said. "I'll wait for you and we'll eat together."

"Thanks," remarked Joe. "But I'll be ten minutes yet, and your appetite may not stand such a delay."

"Oh, yes, it will," laughed Helen. "I'll run over and see how Rosebud is while you finish your practice," and she turned toward the horse tent where her trick pet was contentedly munching his breakfast of oats.

Joe practised faithfully, for he had made up his mind that this was a good time to try to make a new under-water record—that is, new for him.

"If I can't get an elephant, or something big like that, to work in the water with me, I'll have to thrill the crowds by making them wonder how I can live so long without breathing," decided Joe. "I'll do four minutes or—bust!" and he smiled at his conceit.

Joe finished his breathing exercises. In them he made an attempt to hold a full breath for four minutes. This he did, timing himself with his watch. But this, of course, was in the open air, and under water conditions were different.

"If I can only do that in the tank," thought Joe, as he noted the second hand slip five paces beyond the four minute mark, "I'll be all right. Well, I'm going to make a big effort."

Helen came back, and she and Joe went to breakfast. They sat not far from Tonzo and Sid Lascalla, and the former, looking over at Joe, asked:

"When are we going to have that supper?"

"I can't say," Joe answered, trying to be jolly about it.

"What supper is that?" inquired Helen, smiling at Joe.

"Oh, it's one he's going to give to celebrate his increase in salary," answered Tonzo.

Helen looked at Joe, and became aware, from the expression of his face, that there was a hidden meaning in the words. She saw that Joe was embarrassed and so she turned the conversation. Later on, when Helen and Joe were alone, the young aquatic performer said:

"I suppose you are wondering what Tonzo was driving at?"

"Oh, I don't want to hear any secrets," Helen answered.

"It isn't a secret," Joe answered. "At least my increase in salary isn't, for I told you about it. What Tonzo was hinting at was that I ought to give some sort of banquet."

"Why?" Helen demanded.

"Oh, because I'm getting so much money. Well, I suppose I am earning big pay, but, as I claim, I'm doing big work—that is double work. But I'm not going to waste my money on blow-outs."

"I don't blame you," Helen said. "Don't let them worry you, Joe."

The time of the afternoon performance arrived. Everything went off well except that in one elaborate elephant trick one of the huge beasts refused to do his share in the act.

His trainer endeavored to force the big brute, and the elephant grew ugly. It looked for a few seconds as if he would run out of the ring and into the crowd. But two of the more tractable elephants were ordered to force the unruly one into line and they did so.

This caused a little delay, and there was a slight feeling as of panic in the audience. The elephants were near Joe's tank, and for a while the boy fish was afraid lest they knock it over and smash it. In this case there would be a serious delay in getting another, though one spare glass side was always carried.

"And I don't want anything to happen when I'm going to try to make a record," Joe thought.

He had said nothing to Jim Tracy about the attempt he was going to make, preferring not to have the public expect too much through an announcement by the ring-master.

Joe did his usual work, swimming about in the midst of the shimmering goldfish, showing different strokes, turning graceful somersaults and doing a longitudinal whirl that made him look like the propeller of some water craft.

Then Joe performed his tricks, those with the celluloid cards seeming especially to please the audience.

"Mr. Strong will now show you how long it is possible for him to stay under water," announced the ring-master, "and if any of you think it is an easy thing to do, just take out your watches and time him, holding your own breaths as long as does the boy fish. We challenge the world to produce his equal!"

The band blared as Joe made his bow, and then, having inflated his lungs to their capacity, he slipped into the tank, and began "eating."

This was one of the tricks he did to keep the audience amused while the seconds of his underwater endurance were ticked off. It would have been rather monotonous for the crowd merely to look at Joe staying in the tank. He must keep up some kind of action. Then, too, when he was busy, it kept his mind from thinking of the passage of time, and the four minutes, or whatever part of them he remained under the surface, seemed to pass more quickly.

Finally he had done the last of his "water stuff," he had eaten the banana, had pretended to drain his cup of tea and then, yawning and stretching, he prepared for a "nap" under water.

"Now comes the real test!" thought Joe grimly.

Already he was beginning to feel the strain. His temples were throbbing from the retained breath and the water pressure, and his head felt big and stuffy. It was aching, too. Joe had placed outside the tank an alarm clock with big figures so he could keep track of the time. Three minutes and a half had passed, and Joe knew that every second, from now on, would be agony for him, agony that the watching crowd little suspected.

"Can I do it?" thought Joe. The hand was within ten seconds of the four-minute mark. Joe, who had opened his eyes for a brief glance at the clock, shut them again. His heart was beating like a hammer inside his chest, trying to make up for the lack of oxygenated blood.

To Joe it seemed as if fifteen seconds had passed. He gave a swift glance at the clock.

"Only six," he thought. "I'm afraid I can't do it."

To make a complete four minutes he must stay under water four seconds more, and seconds, now, were like hours to him.

There was a ringing in his ears. His head throbbed painfully, he began to yawn and stretch again, as though awakening from a sleep. He looked up and saw Jim Tracy peering anxiously down into the tank. The ring-master realized that this was longer than Joe had ever stayed under water before, and he thought perhaps something had gone wrong, as it had in the case of Benny. The ring-master was calling off the half minutes to the crowd, in which many were holding watches.

A few had tried to imitate Joe's feat, but had given it up as a hopeless task.

"The boy fish has now been under water, without breathing, four minutes, ladies and gentlemen!" cried the ring-master. "He has beaten his own record!"

It was indeed true. But still Joe did not come up. He was fighting for time now—fighting for fractions of a second. He felt as if he would burst, but he did not come up. He saw, by his clock, that he had stayed under four minutes. A second passed—two—three—and still Joe was under water. Then he could not stand it longer. He had come close to the world's second best record at that.

Four seconds—five—and at the last tick of the five seconds over the four minutes, Joe shot up to the surface. He tried not to show his exhaustion as he climbed, dripping wet, out on to the platform and bowed to the plaudits of the enthusiastic crowd, but it was hard work for Joe to keep up. He did it, however.

"Good work, old man!" cried the ring-master as he helped put the bath robe about Joe. "Great work! How'd you do it?"

"Oh—I—I just did it!" panted Joe, breathing in deeply of the life-giving air.

"You didn't tell me you were going to pull off a stunt like that."

"I—I didn't know, myself, whether or not I could do it," said Joe, as he started for his dressing room. "And I didn't want a failure."

"Good boy!" said Jim. "I guess I didn't make any mistake raising your salary, Joe!"

"If you'll give me more money I'll try for a better record yet," said the boy fish with a smile.

"Say, what are you trying to do—become a millionaire?" asked the ring-master, jokingly.

"Oh, I can always use more money," replied Joe.

As he came down to the ground he saw Tonzo Lascalla looking at him. The trapeze performer had heard what Joe said last.

"We don't see much of your money," he commented, with a sneer.

"Why should you?" asked Joe, passing on.

"Oh, Joe! I congratulate you!" cried Helen, as soon as she saw him. "It was wonderful!"

"Glad you think so," he replied. "But I'm not done yet."

"Are you going to try for a longer time?"

"That's what I am. I don't feel very hopeful about it though. I am about to the limit, I guess."

The world's record for a man to stay under water, holding his breath, is four minutes and thirty-seven seconds. Joe was several seconds short of that, but he was ambitious.

It was about a week after this that one day, as Joe and Helen were walking around town after the afternoon performance, Helen paused in front of a furrier's. In the window were fur coats, an advance showing of fall and winter styles, for the summer was passing and already merchants were preparing for the winter's trade.

"That's something I must get," Helen said. "A fur coat. I've been wanting one a long while, and now that I have my inheritance I feel I can afford it. My old one is about worn out."

"I'd like a fur-lined overcoat myself," Joe said.

"Why don't you get it?" asked Helen.

"Can't afford to," was Joe's reply. "I have other uses for my money."

Helen looked at him curiously, and there was a worried look on her face that Joe did not notice.

"I wonder," mused Helen. "I wonder——"

But she did not finish her thought.

## CHAPTER XV

### JOE'S INSPIRATION

Joe Strong was supervising the cleaning of the glass sides of his tank. It was a few days after he had made his record of staying under water more than four minutes, and the circus had moved on to another town. It had arrived on time, and as Joe had a few hours to spare before he had to get his act into shape, he decided he would have the glass cleaned.

Since he had used goldfish and the aquatic plants the transparent sides of the tank occasionally were dimmed by a slight natural growth, and from refuse of the food given to the fish. This made it difficult for the audience to see clearly, so Joe had the glass taken out every few days and scrubbed.

He was watching the men do this now, as he made it a practice to be on hand when this

work was done. The men might grow careless and let one of the big pieces slip, which would mean breakage.

"Going to try something new?" asked Helen, as she passed near Joe where he sat on an empty barrel. Helen carried her riding habit over her arm, having taken it out of her trunk.

"No, just having the tank cleaned," Joe answered. "I wish I could get something new, though. What's wrong with you?" he asked. "Can't you sit down and have a chat?"

"No, I'm going to get Mrs. Watson to help me make a little change in this habit. I want to put on some new ornaments."

Mrs. Watson, the wife of the aged clown, was a sort of mother to all the circus folk. She mended the men's socks, and was always ready to sew up a rent in some distracted woman performer's costume. Mrs. Watson had been a bare-back rider, but increasing age and accumulated flesh had made it necessary for her to give up the work. She now traveled with her husband.

"Joe," began Helen, and she seemed somewhat embarrassed, "I want to ask you something, and I hope you won't be offended."

Joe looked up quickly.

"Offended?" he asked. "You know you couldn't offend me, Helen."

"Oh, I don't know," and her voice was more serious than her manner. "I can't tell how you'll take it. Do you remember the other day saying something about not being able to afford a fur coat?"

"Yes, of course I do. Have you bought yours yet?"

"No, but I've ordered it. But what I want to know is, Joe, why you don't get one, as long as you want it."

"And you thought that question would annoy me? That's queer. I don't get one simply because I can't afford it."

"I haven't yet asked you the question I fear may annoy you," went on Helen. "But this is it, Joe. I know you are getting a good salary, for you told me so. And if you are, what are you doing with it? I—I—this is what I want to ask you, Joe—you're not—not gambling with it—are you?"

She blushed vividly as she made this inquiry.

Joe glanced at the girl curiously. There was a strange look on his face.

"Gambling!" repeated Joe. The men, carrying one of the cleaned glass plates, had moved away.

"Yes," went on Helen. "I feared, when you said you had no money to spare, even with the good salary you are getting, that perhaps you might be wasting it on cards."

Joe shook his head.

"I haven't any use for gambling," he said solemnly, and Helen could not help believing him. "And I don't care for cards, except to do tricks with them. It isn't any fun for me to play, as I could too easily fool the other players—if I wanted to. No, Helen, I'm not spending my money that way—I don't gamble."

"Oh, Joe, I'm so glad! I was afraid you might be, and yet I didn't see how you could be. I thought I knew you better than that. I'm so glad!"

Impulsively she held out her hand, and Joe took it in a warm clasp.

"Now I must hurry away," the girl went on, "or I won't be mended up when the show begins."

She moved off, with a bright look and a nod to Joe, who sat watching the men finish their work of cleaning the glass sides.

"Gambling," mused Joe, as he watched Helen enter the tent where Mrs. Watson had her quarters. "Gambling! I wonder if they are spreading such reports about me just because I don't spend my money on them?"

It was time to put the tank together and to put the water and goldfish in, in readiness for the afternoon show. Joe went to see about this, still puzzling over Helen's question.

The goldfish were carried in a separate tank which the ring-master had provided for them, and Joe, having seen that they were fed, had them turned into the big glass box in which he was soon to go through his act.

"Ah, Señor Strong," called Señorita Tanlazo, the snake charmer, as she passed Joe on her

way to look after her reptiles in their air-holed box, "ah, why did you not take advantage of my offer, and use my nice big anaconda in the tank with you?"

"Thank you again, but no," said Joe. "The anaconda is a little too ill-tempered for me."

"Yes, he is that. I was only joking when I suggested that you use him," said the Spanish woman. "I have to be very careful how I handle him of late. He is getting ready to shed his skin, and that always makes a snake treacherous. But have you put anything new in your act of late? I have not been able to watch you, though they tell me you are quite a drawing card."

"No, I haven't been able to hit on anything new," Joe said. "I wish I could. If you hear of anything I wish you'd let me know."

"I will," promised the snake charmer, as she passed on. "Here is a theatrical paper you might like to look at," she said. "I am through with it; so you need not keep it for me."

She handed Joe a magazine which chronicled the doings of actors and actresses, news of circuses, theatrical companies and other amusement enterprises.

Joe had seen it before, and he now looked through it for any news of Professor Rosello's show, in which he had begun his public career.

"It's still on the road," mused Joe, as he saw a note to that effect. "The professor can't have recovered yet."

Joe turned over the pages of the publication rather idly. As he glanced over the advertisements there was one that caught his attention. He read it once—twice, eagerly. Then he cried:

"Say, I believe that would be the very thing I've been looking for! If I could work that in it would be a hit! I'll write to that man."

The advertisement which had given Joe his inspiration was one offering for sale a trained seal, guaranteed to be kind and gentle, and able to do a number of tricks.

"If I can only work it!" Joe murmured.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE TRAINED SEAL

The first opportunity he had Joe wrote to the man who had advertised in the theatrical paper. The boy fish asked for all particulars regarding the seal, inquiring especially if a stranger could put it through the usual tricks, and if it would readily learn a few new ones.

Then Joe so anxiously watched the incoming mails that it got to be quite a joke with some of the performers as they crowded around when the epistles were distributed.

"What! hasn't she written yet, Joe?" asked Tom Jefferson, the strong man. "Something must be wrong."

"There isn't any *she* about it," Joe would retort, but he could not help getting red in the face.

"You ought to send her a self-addressed envelope," added one of the clowns. "Maybe she can't write, Joe."

"It's awful hard to get your mail when you're with a circus," sighed the snake charmer. "I know I've lost dozens of perfectly good letters. But don't worry, Joe. It may come yet."

"Helen, you'd better look out," joked Bill Watson. "Joe has another friend now, outside the business."

"Oh, I'm not worrying," laughed Helen, but Joe thought she did look at him in a peculiar manner, and she blushed slightly. For Joe's anxiety over the letter was obvious to all.

And he did not want to tell even Helen his expectations and hopes for fear he would be disappointed. He knew Helen would keep his secret if he so requested, but he thought it better, everything considered, not to say anything until he had had a reply from the man who offered the trained seal for sale.

And at last a letter came for him. It had been delayed, reaching a certain town after the circus had left, and it had been forwarded from place to place, always getting there a day after the show had moved on. So that when it finally did reach Joe it was about a week after it had been written.

To Joe's delight the seal was guaranteed to be so kind and docile that a stranger could, in a short time, put it through the course of its tricks. And the animal was said to be young, so that it could be taught new tricks.

"I think it is just what I'm looking for," mused Joe. "If only he hasn't sold it to some one else on account of my delay in answering because I didn't get this letter. I guess I'd better telegraph and say I'll take it, but I'd like to look at it first."

The price asked for the seal was within Joe's means. He quickly decided that, and he also made up his mind that he would take the seal, after having seen it, and add it to his tank act if it came up to his expectations.

One might think that Joe's proper course would have been to apply to the owners of the circus and get them to buy the seal for him. But in circuses, just as is often the case in theatrical companies, the performers "dress" their own acts—that is, they provide all they need to work with, and these accessories become their personal property. Of course in big pageants, such as are sometimes seen with circuses, the management provides the costumes and the weapons, chariots, thrones and other spectacular pieces.

But in an act each performer usually provides his own things. A man with trained dogs will own them personally, as a snake charmer owns her crawling pets. Then, when he leaves one show and goes to another, which is often done, he takes his property with him. It is his act.

In the case of the tank, that belonged to Benny Turton, and Joe was, in a sense, only borrowing it. Now he proposed to add a seal as his personal property. He knew the circus people would not object if the act went well, and they would also provide transportation for the animal, just as they did for Helen's horse, Rosebud, or for the trained dogs.

"Yes, if I can only get this to work I'll make a hit; I'm sure I will," reasoned Joe.

He sent a telegram to the man who had advertised the seal for sale, stating that he would buy it if the animal were as represented, and Joe added that within two days he would call and talk matters over.

He found that the next day the circus would play in a town not far from Elmwood, where the seal's owner lived, and by putting his tank act on a little sooner Joe could get off in the afternoon in time to make the visit and get back to the circus in season for the night's performance; that is, if he made good train connections.

"That's the only trouble," thought Joe, on arrival. "I wouldn't want to be stranded and have to cut out my act at night. That wouldn't look very well. I wonder how I can manage it? If I only had an auto or an airship."

But neither was available just then, though Joe began to think of engaging an automobile if one could be hired in the town.

He was on the verge of making inquiries as to this shortly before the afternoon performance, when, as he walked across the circus lot, he saw a man who had been with the circus the previous season as a juggler. The man was standing near a motor-cycle, and neither looked particularly prepossessing. They were both covered with dust, though the machine was of a standard make, and needed only a good cleaning.

"Hello, Joe!" called the performer. "How are you?"

"Why, it's Babson!" Joe exclaimed. "I haven't seen you in some time. What are you doing? Are you with a show?"

"No, I wish I were," came the answer. "I'm sort of down on my luck. After I left the Sampsons I did well for a while, and then I had an accident to my hand, and I had to quit juggling."

He held out a hand on which were two crooked fingers which seemed permanently out of shape.

"How did it happen?" asked Joe.

"Oh, I had an accident riding this machine. I wish I'd never bought it. I could use the money now to good advantage."

"That's too bad," said Joe, sympathetically.

"I wonder if there's any chance to get on here," went on Babson. "I could help in an animal act—I know something about the cats."

"You might try," Joe said. "I saw Jim Tracy around a while ago."

"What are you doing?" Babson asked. "Same trapeze work?"

"Oh, no; I've got a new act—Turton's tank. He gave out, you know. Come on in and watch. It makes quite a hit. I've put in a lot of new stuff, and I'm thinking of adding more." Then, in a sudden burst of confidence, Joe told about the seal, though it was the first time he had

mentioned his new idea to any one.

"I'm going to see about it now, as soon as I finish," Joe said. "Getting back from Elmwood is all that bothers me, though. The train connections are pretty close. I was just going to see about hiring an auto. Know where I can get one in this town?"

"What do you want with an auto when I have my little jitney?" asked Babson, indicating the motor-cycle. "She's a good machine, but I haven't cleaned her lately. She'll carry double, too. Hop up behind me and I'll have you at Elmwood in no time. I'll bring you back, too, though I won't promise to carry the seal. Time is no object to me—now," and he laughed rather grimly.

"Say, I believe I'll take you up," Joe said. "That is, if you'll allow me to pay you as I would have to pay a chauffeur."

"Pay nothing!" exclaimed the man. "I guess I can do you that favor. If you feel like spending any money why don't you buy this machine? I'll sell it cheap, and you could have a lot of fun with it. Take your wife out for a run between performances."

"I haven't one," laughed Joe.

"Well, you may have one some day. That's no reason for not buying my motor-cycle. I'll let you have it cheap."

"I don't know how to run one," objected Joe.

"It won't take you long to learn. Come on, I'll take you over and you can look at the seal, and I'll be giving you instructions on the way."

"All right," agreed Joe. "But first come in and watch my act. Then you can see Tracy, too."

And so it was arranged. Babson was disappointed in not securing work from the ring-master, who said, though, that there might be an opening later. But the former juggler enjoyed Joe's act, and said so.

"Don't say anything about the seal proposition," Joe cautioned him, as he went out with Babson after the performance in the tank. "I don't want it known until I actually have the seal."

"Oh, I'll keep quiet. But say, Joe, that act of yours, as it stands now, is a dandy! It sure is!"

"Glad you like it. I'm going to make it better yet, I think."

Joe enjoyed the trip on the motor-cycle. It was not his first one, for a boy he once knew in Bedford owned one, and Joe had frequent rides on it. But now he took a new interest, since he began to consider buying this one.

"It wouldn't be such a bad idea," he told himself as Babson explained how simple it was to ride and operate one. "And I suppose Helen would come for a ride now and then. It wouldn't be any bother taking it with me. A motor-cycle, more or less, wouldn't matter to a circus."

Joe found the seal still unsold. The man had owned several of the intelligent creatures which he took about with him giving performances in theatres. But his health had broken down, and he had been forced to give up his act and had advertised his seals for sale.

"I only have this one seal left," he explained to Joe, "but she is the best of the lot. I hate to part with her."

They went out to the barn, where there was a large tank of water. Stepping up to it Mr. Blossom, the seal's owner, called loudly:

"Here, Lizzie!"

The water had been calm and placid, but in a moment it was violently agitated, and a queer snakelike head was thrust up, while there came a series of loud cries:

"Hook! Hook! Hook!"

"There she is," said Mr. Blossom. He leaned his head over close to the water, and the seal, swimming to him, seemed to kiss him.

"That's the girl, Lizzie!" Mr. Blossom exclaimed. "And now I suppose you want your reward."

From a pail near the tank he took up a dead fish. The seal held up her head high from the water. Mr. Blossom balanced the fish on the animal's nose, and raised a finger.

"No, no. Not yet, Lizzie!" he cried. "Wait a moment."

Turning to Joe, the trainer said: "Count three, and then snap your fingers."

Joe did so, and no sooner had the snap come than the seal, which had fixed its intelligent eyes on Joe, tossed the fish up into the air, caught it in its mouth as it came down and



swallowed it. Then, with another loud "Hook!" the animal dived and swam rapidly to the far side of the tank.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE NEW ACT

Joe and Babson stood looking in admiration at the swimming seal. Nothing in the water could be more swift or graceful.

"If I could only swim like that," murmured Joe.

"They tell me you are a sort of human fish," remarked Mr. Blossom. "You do a tank act, you tell me."

"Yes, and I've been thinking of adding to the novelty of it. That is why I want your seal. Tell me, do you think I could train him—or, I suppose, it's a her, since you call her Lizzie."

"Yes, it is a female, and she is very affectionate. I believe you could train her to work with you, though I have never swum in the tank with her. I don't know just how she'd take to it. You may try here, if you like. It is large enough. I used to keep ten seals here when I was not on the road."

Joe rather liked the idea of giving the seal a practical test before purchasing her. If the animal objected to being in a tank of water with a human being she would be useless for his act, and he might as well know that now as later.

"You saw how quickly she obeyed you about the fish," went on Mr. Blossom, "and I think she would as readily take orders from you in regard to other tricks. She is young and learns readily. If you like, I can let you take an old bathing suit, and you can go into the tank now, if you have time."

"Oh, yes, we have time enough, now that I have a motor-cycle at my disposal," Joe answered. "I believe I would like to see how Lizzie will behave."

The seal shot out on to a small platform near the edge of the tank, her body glistening wet. Again she cried in that peculiar way, which is best represented by the word "Hook!", sometimes with the "h" silent.

"More fish, that's what she's asking for," said the trainer. "Here you are, Lizzie." He held up one from the pail. The seal flipped her way over to him, and with a snap of her jaws bit the fish cleanly in two pieces with her sharp teeth.

"Whew!" whistled Joe. "She can bite, can't she? I hope she doesn't take a notion to do that to my leg."

"She's as gentle as a baby," declared Mr. Blossom. "Look!"

He called the seal to him, and put his hand in her mouth. She nuzzled him as a pet horse might do, but made not the slightest effort to bite.

"I think you would be safe," said the trainer to Joe. "There isn't a gentler sea-lion in the world, and I've handled a good many of them."

"Is this a sea-lion?" asked Joe. "I thought they were those big animals with long tusks."

"You're thinking of walruses," said Mr. Blossom. "Lizzie really is a sea-lion, though it is easier for me to call her a seal, since nine out of ten persons do so. Few know the difference between a seal and a sea-lion. The latter, of which Lizzie is a specimen, have flat front flippers, without hair and triangular in shape. They use their flippers almost as well as we do our hands, and you can see what an aid they are in swimming. The sea-lions have long necks, and carry their heads well up. There are nine species of them, and the so-called 'fur seal' is one. Sea-lions are mostly used in acts such as mine, and shown in zoological parks, for they are active, easy to keep and, you might say, cheerful.

"On the other hand, the seals have short stubby front flippers, provided with claws and covered with hair. Seals haven't half the power in their front flippers that sea-lions have, and, as a result, the seals are much less active and interesting. Seals have very short necks, in comparison with sea-lions.

"I tell you this," said Mr. Blossom to Joe, "so you can answer questions if any one in the audience should ask you about your act—that is, provided you buy Lizzie."

"I'm much obliged to you," answered the boy fish. "And I'm almost sure I'll take your seal—I mean sea-lion—if she'll act in the tank with me. Now for a trial."

Soon, attired in an old bathing suit belonging to Mr. Blossom, Joe entered the tank and began to swim about. There was considerably more room than in his glass tank, and he did several of his tricks.

"Say, you *are* a sort of human fish!" exclaimed the sea-lion's trainer.

During the time Joe was in the tank Lizzie remained on the platform gazing at him. She followed his every movement with her big intelligent eyes, but she showed no disposition to enter the water with Joe. But she did not seem frightened.

"In, Lizzie! In!" commanded Mr. Blossom.

Lizzie "Hooked!" but that was all, save that she moved about on the platform.

"Come on, Lizzie; go in and have a dip!" her master commanded.

But the seal (which is the name used here merely because it is a popular one, and not because it is correct) refused to go in, and Joe began to fear his plan would be a failure.

"You call her," suggested Babson, who had been watching the proceedings.

"Come on, Lizzie! I won't hurt you!" called Joe.

"Hook! Hook! Ook!" barked the seal.

"Here, I think this will take her in," said Mr. Blossom. He tossed a fish into the tank, and, after a brief moment of hesitation, in flopped the seal.

"Good!" cried Joe.

Like a flash the seal swam for the fish, and ate it at a gulp. Then she swam back to the platform, upon which she clambered.

"Well, we've got her started, anyhow," said the trainer. "I think she'll soon get used to you."

Joe continued to swim about. Another fish was thrown in and this time Lizzie did not go out so quickly. She swam about and even let Joe approach her. Then the lad dived, turning a somersault in the tank.

The seal snorted, gave her peculiar cry, and then, to the delight of Joe, who, with open eyes under water, could see every motion, Lizzie fairly imitated his act, turning over and over and shooting out on to the platform.

"I guess you've got her started," said Mr. Blossom. "Give her a few more trials."

For half an hour Joe remained in the tank, and every minute Lizzie seemed to grow more friendly toward him. Finally she let him swim at her side, though, of course, Joe could not equal the seal in speed. Then she let him put his hands on her, and she took fish from Joe's fingers.

"I guess she'll do," said the tank-performer, as he came out. "I'll take her, Mr. Blossom, and trust to luck that she'll act with me in public. Now, can you ship her to me in good condition?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. I still have some of the shipping crates I used to use when on the theatrical circuit, and Lizzie is accustomed to traveling. You may have a little trouble with her in a new tank, and one of glass such as you use, but if you are patient with her I think she'll soon learn to do just what you want her to. That is the one great secret of training animals—seals or any other kind. One must be gentle and have infinite patience. I wish you good luck."

"Thank you," replied Joe heartily. "If I can make this act go I think it will be a good thing for me and the circus, too."

He donned his clothes and paid the sum agreed upon for the seal. It was a bargain as such things go, for Joe knew something about the value of trained animals. Lizzie would be shipped to the next town in which the circus showed, and in a crate she had formerly traveled in, and this crate Joe would use in transporting his new acquisition about the country.

"Well, now I'm ready to go back with you, Babson," announced Joe. "It sure was good of you to bring me on the machine. Only for that I couldn't have made that tank test and gotten back in time. As it is now, I'll have an hour or so to spare."

"Yes, a motor-cycle is handy for getting anywhere in a hurry," said Babson. "Why don't you buy mine and work it in your tank act?"

"I don't see how I could," laughed Joe. "But I don't know but that it would be a good thing to have, anyhow. I could take rides about the country."

"You and your wife—when you get one," added Babson. "I'll let you have this machine cheap, for I'm in want of cash just now. It's in good shape, I'll guarantee that, though it is rather

travel-stained. I've ridden about on it a lot lately, following up circuses and Wild West outfits looking for work. What do you say?"

He named a price that Joe knew was reasonable, and the upshot of it was that Joe became possessed of the motor-cycle.

"It sure is going some to get a trained seal and a gasoline craft all in one day," laughed Joe, as he completed the transaction. "I don't know which one will give me the most trouble."

Joe went through his tank act that night with more zest than usual, and received an ovation when he remained under water four minutes and ten seconds.

"I'm coming on," he congratulated himself. "I guess that motor-cycle ride to-day did me good. I must take more. And when I get my performing seal in the water with me—well, I can ask for more money for the act. It'll be worth it, and I'll need it, for I'll have some expenses I didn't have before."

Joe told Helen of his new purchases, and spoke about the change he intended to make in his tank act.

"Is that what you've been saving your money for?" she asked.

"No," Joe said. "Both the seal and the motor-cycle were accidents, so to speak. Do you think you'd like to ride with me?"

"I certainly would. And I'm anxious to see the seal."

The animal, which had traveled safely, was awaiting Joe on his arrival in the next town. He had told Mr. Tracy of Lizzie, and the showman was enthusiastic about the chance Joe had taken to add to his act.

"I hope it works all right," the ring-master said. "You'll have to try it out in private."

"Oh, surely," assented Joe.

He made arrangements to have his motor-cycle and seal added to the car in which his tank and goldfish were carried, so all his special possessions would be together.

"As soon as I get Lizzie trained, or partly so, I'll begin to practise motor-cycling," Joe decided.

He began the seal's education the second day after he obtained possession of her, allowing one day to go past so Lizzie could get used to her new quarters. Then, as soon as the tank was set up and filled with water, Joe had the seal taken to the foot of the steps that led to the platform. Lizzie had been trained to go up a short flight of steps to her own tank.

"Now to see what she'll do," said Joe, as Helen and some others of the circus folk gathered about to watch the experiment. Joe had arranged for a supply of fresh fish, and one of these he now put on the top step.

Lizzie flapped out of her box, she smelled the fish, and, looking at it, she cried: "Hook! Hook! Hook!" and up the steps she went as she had been in the habit of doing.

"Now if she'll only go into the tank that will be part of the game solved," mused Joe. He had not put in the goldfish, for he knew, no matter how well trained Lizzie was, she would surely eat the fish if they were left in the tank. The problem of using them in his new act was one Joe had not yet solved.

Up the steps, in her peculiar manner, went Lizzie, the trained seal, and at the top she gulped down the fish. Then, after a moment's hesitation, in which she looked about the tank, she plunged in and began to swim about as though used to it all her life.

"Good!" cried Joe. "The glass sides didn't bother her a bit. I was afraid they would. Now to see how she acts with me."

He had on his fish suit and, moving slowly in order not to alarm the sea-lion, Joe went into the glass tank with her. At first Lizzie seemed a bit timid, and came out. But Joe coaxed her in again with a bit of fish, and soon he and the seal were swimming about in the big glass tank, while the circus folk outside applauded gladly.

Around and around swam Joe, going through many evolutions, and, swimming sometimes at his side, sometimes above and sometimes below him, went Lizzie.

"Say! That's a great act!" cried Jim Tracy, coming in at that moment. "A great act!"

He told Joe as much when the boy fish came out to breathe, as Lizzie had also to do, for a seal has lungs, and not gills like a fish.

"It was a great act, Joe!" said the ring-master.

"It remains to be seen whether she'll do as nicely in public," Joe replied.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SAD NEWS

Joe spent as much time as he could spare before the afternoon performance in practising with Lizzie. The trained seal seemed to have taken naturally to the boy fish and was becoming quite friendly. She would let Joe put his arms around her as they both swam under water, and she made no attempts to bite. This was one thing Joe had feared, for he knew that a nip from the sharp teeth of the sea-lion would make a bad wound.

But Lizzie seemed content with the fish, and the number of them she could eat and the ease with which she bit them into two pieces when they were too large to take at one mouthful showed her appetite as well as the strength of her jaws and the keenness of her teeth.

"Going to put on the new act this afternoon, Joe?" asked the ring-master at the conclusion of the practice.

"I think I'd better not," was the answer. "Something might go wrong, and it would queer me, I think. Wait a few days. I want to get her used to the tent, the crowds and the lights. You see, she has only worked in theatres up to the present time."

"Well, maybe you're right," agreed the ring-master.

So that afternoon Joe did his usual tank act, with the goldfish placed in the big glass box. Joe ate his bananas under water, and though he tried to equal his other record of four minutes and ten seconds he had to come up two seconds sooner than the day before.

"I guess I've been going it too hard practising with Lizzie," he reflected. "Then, too, I didn't have a motor-cycle ride. I must get out the machine."

The trained seal was brought into the tent that evening before the night performance and allowed to climb up the steps to get a fish. The gasoline incandescent lights were set aglow, for Joe's object was to see if the strange surroundings at night would bother the seal any.

But Lizzie did not seem to mind. She flopped her way up the steps, ate the fish and plunged into the tank of water, from which the goldfish had again been taken.

"I'll have to think up some way of keeping them in when I work with Lizzie in the water," mused Joe. "They're too pretty to leave out of the act, but unless I put a muzzle on her I don't see how I can keep her from eating them. Well, I'll think of that later."

Joe did not get in the tank with Lizzie for practice that night, as he wanted her to learn gradually. Then, too, he was rather tired, and he had his trapeze work to do in addition to his aquatic act.

That night Lizzie, by Joe's orders, was left in her crate in the big tent while the show went on. Joe's object was to let the seal hear the music and the various noises, to see the lights, and to grow accustomed to the general atmosphere of a night performance in the "main top."

"Then she'll understand what she has to go through with six days out of the week during the season," said Joe.

But something funny happened at that night's performance. Joe was in the midst of his tank act, and was getting ready to come out, prior to going in for the endurance test, when he heard the now familiar:

"Hook! Hook! Ook!"

"Lizzie's loose!" he exclaimed, looking around from the platform on which he stood, inflating his lungs with air to get ready for the four-minute—and longer—under-water stay.

And there, flapping her way over the ground toward the steps that led to the tank platform, was the trained seal. She had gotten out of her crate—though how Joe did not know—and was coming to the place she remembered as her feeding station.

Joe had to act quickly. The tank contained the goldfish, and to let Lizzie in now would mean that some of the pretty fish would be eaten. It would not do to have that happen in public.

"Take her back!" Joe cried to some of the ring attendants. "Don't let her get on the steps."

For Lizzie moved quickly and she could ascend the steps in a very short time, hitching herself along by her flippers. And once at the top, Joe knew a sight of the goldfish swimming around freely in the tank would be too much for the seal.

But Lizzie did not want to be caught, and she flapped away from the attendants who ran after her. They laughingly pursued the seal, and a little boy in the crowd cried:

"Oh, Mamma! What a funny game of tag! They're trying to make the seal it!"

Those about the youngster laughed, and Joe joined in. But Lizzie, while agile, was more used to the water than the land, and she was soon caught and carried, barking protestingly, to her crate. Joe ran over and saw that the door was securely fastened before he went on with his act.

"I don't want her to come splashing in after the fish when I'm trying to hold my breath for an under-water record," reflected Joe.

Lizzie did not get out again, and Joe went through his turn successfully, though he did not quite equal his former endurance.

"I must be out in the air more and increase my breathing capacity," he decided. "The motor-cycle for me!"

Joe's life was now a busy one—busier even than when he had traveled about with Professor Rosello. For the boy fish still kept up his trapeze work—at least, the greater part of it—he did his usual tank work, and in addition he rehearsed each day with Lizzie. He was not yet quite ready to put that act on in public. He wanted to make it a finished piece of work, with no chance for failure, as far as he could foresee.

Still Joe found time to practise some on the motor-cycle. He had mastered the method of controlling and driving it, and all he needed now was practice. Joe had been a good bicycle rider, and this stood him in good stead though the motion was much swifter, and the exhilaration of fairly flying through space with no effort on his part was new to him.

He found that this swift motion in the open air was doing him good. His lung power, which was most excellent, was improved, and he began to have hopes of equalling the world's record of under-water work—four minutes and thirty-seven seconds.

"And I'll even try to beat it," he thought.

Joe found time to ride immediately after breakfast when his tank was being set up in the tent. He did not take part in the parade, and having seen to it that the glass box was being properly put together, and having fed Lizzie, he would ride off around the country on the motor-cycle. And as he rode Joe began to turn over in his mind plans for utilizing the machine in some trick.

"Though I don't just see my way clear to it now," he told himself.

Finally Joe became so well-used to the gasoline bicycle, as he sometimes called it, that he took Helen out with him, she sitting on the seat in the rear. Naturally a good equilibrist, the girl took easily to the motor-cycle, and even when Joe went at top speed on some smooth road she liked it.

"Oh, it's just great!" she said. "I'll think Rosebud is terribly slow after this."

The time quickly came when Joe was first to exhibit the seal in public. Lizzie had been behaving well, and in private she and Joe did all sorts of tricks under water. Joe took down with him to his table some pieces of fish. While he ate the bananas he would hold up on a fork a piece of fish for Lizzie to take.

The seal would curve gracefully downward, take the morsel and eat it under water, even as Joe ate his fruit. It made a novel scene.

"And now to see how it goes in public!" said Joe.

The big tent was crowded when the boy fish entered his tank that afternoon, and after going through some preliminary work, showing the tricks with the celluloid cards and other of his sleight-of-hand performances, Joe gave the signal, and Lizzie was let out of her cage.

Barking and uttering her peculiar cry, she flapped her way to the steps. Up them she went, taking the piece of fish left there to tempt her, and then into the tank she plunged with Joe. Of course the goldfish were not being used.

Then, while the wondering crowd looked on, Joe and the seal swam about together, showing off to the best advantage. It was a good act, and the throng appreciated it, applauding mightily. To cap the climax, Joe and the seal ate under water. Lizzie behaved perfectly, paying no attention to the crowd. Nor did the transparent sides of glass annoy her as they had just a little at first, when she would sometimes unexpectedly bump her nose against them.

It was one of the best aquatic exploits ever exhibited, and the ring-master so announced it. Jim Tracy was delighted with Joe's work, and Joe was pleased himself. Lizzie was certainly a great acquisition.

Back and forth, around and around, up and down, turning, somersaulting and doing all manner of swimming went Joe and Lizzie.

"I couldn't have a better act unless I got a real live mermaid to perform with me," Joe decided, as Lizzie shot up out of the water to breathe.

Joe did not know the length of time the sea-lion could stay under water without breathing. Doubtless she could rival him, but she never did—at least, in the glass tank. A minute seemed to be her limit of endurance, though Joe had no means of making an accurate decision.

At any rate, the act was a big success, and Joe had to bow and bow again to the applause as he came out after his endurance test. This time he made it four minutes and eleven seconds, a gain of one, and he ascribed his better lung power to motor-cycle riding in the open air.

"Good work! Good!" was Jim Tracy's compliment at the conclusion of the performance.

"I'm glad to hear him say that," said the boy fish. "It will make it easier to ask for more money, for that's what I'm going to do."

When the mail was distributed just before supper, there was a letter for Joe.

"Hello! This is too bad!" Joe exclaimed as he read the note.

"What is it?" asked Helen.

"Bad news," Joe answered. "There isn't any hope for Benny after all!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### HELEN'S SOLUTION

Helen read the letter which Joe held out to her. It confirmed the news the boy fish had given. The note was from the physician who had first attended Benny in the circus tent, and stated that though originally it was hoped an operation would prevent the youth from becoming permanently deaf and dumb, such hope now had to be abandoned.

The physician went into the particulars of the case in writing to Joe, who, it seemed, had left word that he wished to be informed as to Benny's progress. It was his belief that the long continued practice of Benny in staying under water had brought on a disease of the ears and throat.

"I thought it would be comparatively easy to operate on him, or get some surgeon better qualified than I to do it," wrote the hospital doctor. "But, after a consultation, we have decided that it would be dangerous, and so, as far as we can see, there is no hope for your friend. He will not die—in fact, he is much stronger than he was—but he will be unable to speak or hear. He will write you himself shortly, he indicated to me. Just at present he is too down-hearted to do so."

"Poor fellow," murmured Helen, sympathetically, "I should think he would be. Isn't it just perfectly terrible, Joe?"

"It certainly is hard luck!"

"Can't anything be done?"

"I don't see what," was the moody answer. "I was planning to—oh, well, no matter."

"Go on, tell me," Helen urged.

Joe shook his head.

"No. There isn't any use now," he said. "I—I can't do what I intended to, that's all. Poor Benny."

"Yes; poor Benny," echoed Helen.

The sad news concerning the "human fish" soon spread among the circus folk, and much sympathy was expressed for Benny Turton. A movement was started to get up a purse for him, and a small sum was raised. Circus performers do not get the big salaries which theatrical stars are credited with, and, in addition, most of those with the Sampson Brothers' Show had families to support. Then, too, the circus was not one of the big ones. So, all told, not much was done for the youth in the hospital.

Helen and Joe each wrote him a letter, encouraging him as much as they could, but they both knew that the first sudden shock of hearing the bad news must wear off from Benny's mind before he could begin to be reconciled to it.

"Well, it isn't as bad as going blind," remarked Helen with a sigh. "That would be too terrible! Benny can still have the pleasure of reading and seeing things."

"Yes, his case might be worse," admitted Joe. He seemed in a thoughtful mood, and more

than once that evening Helen surprised him in a deep study.

"What are you thinking of, Joe?" she finally asked.

"Oh, nothing—that is, nothing that seems to get me anywhere," he answered.

But if the news from Benny was saddening, Joe had plenty of other matters to make him rejoice, and the principal one was that the trained seal was such a success in the tank act. For Lizzie certainly shared the honors with Joe, and the boy fish was contemplating elaborating the act. He thought of having the seal do a series of juggling and other tricks on a platform near the tank, either before or after the under-water work.

"But I guess we'd better wait until next season for that," said Jim Tracy when Joe spoke of it. "You see every act is timed now to occupy just so much of the programme. If I should give you more than twice the time you now have I'd have to cut some one else, and no one would like that."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't want that," Joe declared. As it was, there was plenty of professional jealousy directed toward him, and he did not want to arouse more by encroaching on the time of some other performer.

"I could cut out all of your trapeze work," went on the ring-master, "but I don't want to do that. We haven't any too many good trapezists."

"Thanks," said Joe. "I wouldn't want to give up the bar and rope work, either. I guess I'll wait until next season to give Lizzie a larger part in the act."

Joe did not want to give up his trapeze work for several reasons, one being that it kept him in trim for a certain hazy plan he had in mind. Joe was a youth on whom great heights made no impression. He felt fully as safe on the dizzy height of some church steeple as he did on the ground.

There are some persons who have a morbid fear of looking down from any great height, and who always refuse to ascend a high place or to look down from the top of a tall building.

There is another class of people who are really made temporarily insane when looking from a great height and have an almost irresistible inclination to throw themselves down. There is a complicated medical term which is applied to this disease, for a disease it is. Such persons should never look down from great heights.

But, fortunately, Joe was not in this class. He did not in the least mind climbing high up into the air, with even a frail support. And it was his trapeze work that kept him in good trim for this sort of daring, so Joe did not want to give it up.

The tank act, with Lizzie, the seal, in it, was made one of the big features of the circus. Jim Tracy had new bills printed showing Joe and Lizzie apparently having a fine time under water. The posters were large and in gay colors, and Joe's name was featured, to the envy of many others in the circus.

Not a few were the sneers cast at Joe on more than one occasion, when he declined to take part in some jollification, and remarks were made about his being a miser and a "tight-wad."

But Joe did not seem to care. He drew his salary regularly, and as he was not known to gamble or to have other noticeably bad habits, there was considerable speculation as to what he did with his money.

"He doesn't send any to his folks, for he hasn't any folks," said Tonzo Lascalla. "He told me so. His foster father is well off, and doesn't need any cash from Joe, and he hasn't any other relatives, except maybe some in England he never heard of."

"Maybe he's saving to hire a lawyer to get his English fortune for him," suggested Sid Lascalla.

"Maybe," agreed his partner.

But, as a matter of fact, Joe had about given up hope of ever hearing anything favorable from England. His inquiries had come to naught, though Bill Watson insisted that Janet Willoughby, which was Mrs. Strong's name before her marriage, came from a wealthy and aristocratic family.

The circus moved on from town to town, and Joe was more and more satisfied with his purchase of the trained seal. Lizzie in the tank with Joe was certainly an added attraction. The seal seemed to like the under-water work as much as Joe did. She ate her fish as Joe ate his bananas, and was a pretty sight as she cavorted around in the water with the boy fish swimming by her side.

Joe took frequent rides on his motor-cycle, Helen often accompanying him, and when one day he found he was able to stay under water for four minutes and twenty seconds he ascribed his success to his swift riding in the open air.

"I'll go after the world's record before the season is over," he said to Helen.

"I hope you make it," she said.

"One thing bothers me, though," said Joe. "I can't use the goldfish in the tank when I act with Lizzie. She'd do nothing but eat them. And it's quite a bother to have to take the fish out every time just before I let Lizzie go into the water. I could have two tanks, I suppose, doing part of my act in one with the goldfish, and then changing to another with the seal. But I have enough duff to cart about as it is. I don't want another big tank."

"No, it would be a nuisance," agreed Helen.

"I've tried and tried to think of a way to use the double act, but I can't," Joe went on. "I took a couple of goldfish into the tank with Lizzie and me one day, but she gobbled them up before I could turn over. I didn't repeat that experiment."

Helen seemed to be thinking deeply. Suddenly she clapped her hands, her eyes sparkled, and she cried:

"Oh, Joe! I believe I have it!"

"Have what?"

"The solution of your trouble. I think I know a way in which you can use the goldfish and the seal in the same tank."

"How, by putting a muzzle on Lizzie?"

"No, but by using a tank with double glass sides. Let me show you what I mean!"

## **CHAPTER XX**

### **ACROSS THE TRESTLE**

Helen, with a pencil and piece of paper, began rapidly making a little sketch. Joe looked over her shoulder. They were in the outer section of the dressing tent, waiting for their turn to go on with their acts.

"See," Helen explained, "you can easily put double glass sides on your tank by slipping sheets of glass inside the four present outer sides, leaving a space of five or six inches between them. Fill this space with water, and put the goldfish in that. Then they can swim around, and Lizzie can't get at them because they'll be protected by the glass."

She made a sectional view of the tank with its double sides and held it up triumphantly to Joe.

"Will that solve the puzzle?" she asked.

"Why, I really believe it will!" exclaimed Joe, after a moment's thought. "Yes, I could have metal clips, made water-tight with rubber, fitted inside the tank. Taking five inches off each side wouldn't mean much loss. Then I could slip four sheets of glass down in the metal clips, and, as you say, fill the intervening space with water for the goldfish."

"Exactly," cried Helen. "The audience can't tell whether the fish are in the tank with you or not, for the water and glass, being transparent, will make it look exactly as if you and the fish and the seal were in the same bit of water."

"Good!" cried Joe. "I'll do it! The very thing, Helen!"

The fact that persons looking directly at a glass tank of water can not tell how far back the water and tank extends is taken advantage of by moving picture operators in producing novel effects. Only the other day was shown a scene where a man apparently went down to the bottom of a river. Fish swam all about him, there was a portion of a wreck half buried in the sand and mud, and waving aquatic plants seemed to reach out and twine themselves around the man, while fish swam above and below him.

This effect was produced by having the man go through certain actions behind a square glass tank in which the sand, aquatic plants, wreck and fish had been placed. The fish could swim about, but the man was not in the water at all but behind the tank, the water and glass offering no obstruction to the camera.

It was that principle which Helen suggested to Joe. He and the seal would be doing their act behind a glass and water screen, in which fish were swimming and aquatic plants gently waving.

Joe lost no time in putting the plan into operation. He ordered the glass and metal holding clips, with the water-tight rubber gaskets, from the same firm in New York that had



originally made Benny's tank. They still had the patterns, and knew just the proper size and kind of glass to send, and Joe had no difficulty in malting his tank a double one.

The experiment was tried in private one afternoon just before the performance. The plants and goldfish were put in the thin outer tank which extended all around the inner one. The fish, of course, swam about as they were in the habit of doing. The fact that they were in a much more restricted space did not seem to perplex or vex them.

Then Joe got into the inner tank, and Lizzie was allowed to follow him. No sooner did the seal see herself surrounded by the fish she loved to eat than she made a dash for a big golden one.

Of course Lizzie bumped her nose against the protecting glass, but this did not deter her. Joe watched the sea-lion curiously. Again she made a dash for a fish, evidently thinking she had not been quick enough to get the first one. Again came a painful bump.

Joe continued to swim about as he always did when Lizzie was in the tank. It was not until after her third failure that the intelligent seal began to think something was wrong. Then she swam alongside the inner glass. Just beyond, three-quarters of an inch away, but as secure as though the space were miles, swam the goldfish. Lizzie could not get them, and then she turned her big eyes on Joe as if to ask what sort of trick this was to play on a good, performing seal.

If Joe had not been under water he would have laughed. He did this when he came up, however, and he gave Lizzie more than her usual allowance of common fish to make up for her disappointment over the gold ones.

But Helen's solution of the problem was perfect. The circus folk formed a critical rehearsal audience and as Joe swam about in the inner tank with the seal, and as the goldfish flitted about in the outer tank, Jim Tracy said:

"It couldn't be better. The illusion is perfect. No one looking at it as the crowd will view it, could tell but that it was all one tank. Helen, you're a fine suggester. First I know, you'll be going into business for yourself."

"Not while I have Rosebud," she answered, blushing. "But I'm glad my plan worked."

Joe was glad also. Not only was he enabled to get a much more spectacular effect by having the goldfish and his seal in the same act, but it saved a lot of work in taking out the fish every time he wanted to perform with Lizzie. And as it had been necessary to take the goldfish out twice a day—for the afternoon and night performance—much work was entailed. And there is so much to do, anyhow, in moving a circus from place to place, that everything which makes for economy of time or motion is very welcome and eagerly adopted.

That afternoon the audience seemed to appreciate very much the aquatic act. It certainly made a pretty scene with Joe, in his red scaly suit, going through all manner of performances in the water, while the dark seal swam in and out, sometimes circling around his head, again darting through his looped arms, while on all sides they were surrounded by goldfish and gracefully waving green grass and plants.

It was one of the showiest acts in the circus, and taking advantage one day of a particularly gracious reception on the part of the crowd, and when he had lengthened his stay under water by two seconds, Joe asked for more money.

Jim Tracy whistled in mild surprise, but he did not make half the objections he had made on the other occasion.

"I'm under a lot more expense," Joe explained. "Lizzie cost me money, and I have to buy fish for her every day. Besides, the extra tank fittings cost considerable."

"All right, Joe. I'm not making any kick," said the ring-master. "You're certainly worth a lot to us, and we can't afford to lose you. I wouldn't say that to every performer, or they'd get such a swelled head that there'd be no doing anything with them. But you're different, I'm glad to say. Yes, you shall have more money. The act is worth it, especially since you got Lizzie. First you know you'll be a millionaire, my boy."

"Not in this business, I guess," laughed Joe.

Joe found himself liking more and more his motor-cycle rides. Helen, too, enjoyed them very much. She was even learning to manage the machine herself, though, as yet, she had not ventured to drive it at more than a slow speed, and then on some little-frequented road.

As soon as the circus reached a town where it was to show, and Joe and Helen had had their breakfast, and had seen, one to his tank and seal and the other to her horse, they would set off for a ride through the beautiful country. It took them away from the atmosphere of the circus, and rested them mentally and physically. They were in better trim for the strenuous and exacting work that was to follow.

Helen had greatly elaborated her act since the time when Joe had first seen it. She had

taken a little dog—the same one that had refused to act with Joe in the tank—and had trained it to ride with her on Rosebud's back. The dog did some simple tricks, and that, with the beautiful and intelligent horse and Helen, who herself was strikingly pretty, made an act that always was well applauded.

"I only hope you two don't have a break-down when you're out on the road motor-cycling some day," said Jim Tracy. "If you do, and don't get back to the show on time—well, I don't know what I'll do."

Joe had not thought of that, and thereafter he was careful not to go too far away, so, in case of some accident to the machine, he could hire a horse and wagon to bring him and Helen back. But the machine had not yet given him trouble and he hoped it would not.

"I'm very glad I bought it from Babson," he said, "though the day I got it and the seal I seemed to be going it pretty heavy in the matter of expenditures."

Then, one day, Joe had his accident. It was not a very serious one, merely the breaking of the motor-cycle transmission chain, but as far as making the machine go without it, Joe might as well have had a bad smash-up.

Helen was not with him, and he was glad of this, for when the break came he was on his way back to the circus grounds, as it was nearing time for the afternoon performance.

Joe tried to mend the chain himself, but a link was needed and he had no spare one. He was looking about on the country road for some place where he could hire a horse and carriage, when he met a small boy who told him there was a garage about a mile away. Joe decided that if he could get his chain repaired he could make better time than by engaging a horse.

Accordingly he pushed the heavy machine along a sandy road until he came to the garage and repair shop. To his delight, the machinist said he could easily repair the chain, and he set about it.

But Joe had consumed more time in his weary walk than he was aware of, and when the chain was mended and he set off again, he had barely time to reach the circus on time, even if he rode at top speed, and had excellent roads all the way.

He was returning by a different route from the one he had taken on going out, and now he regretted it, for the way was longer.

"I'm afraid I'm not going to make it," Joe decided as he looked at his watch. "I've cut my schedule too fine."

He came to a small village and inquired of some loungers if there was not a shorter route to the circus town than the one he had been told to take.

"Well, there is a short cut," said a man, "if you can ride the railroad track. Otherwise you can't get over the river without going five miles out of your way. The railroad bridge over the river is the only one around here, and it's a long, high bridge at that."

"I guess I can ride the railroad," said Joe. "What sort of a bed is it—cracked stone?"

"No, cinders."

Joe was glad to hear that, for cracked stone would have worked havoc to his tires.

"He can't ride no railroad line," declared another man, positively.

"Why not?" Joe wanted to know.

"You can't ride over the railroad trestle, and it's more than a mile long, counting the approaches. If you walk you won't make any better time than if you went around the long way. You can't ride that machine over the open ties. It would rattle it all to pieces. The only way you can do is to walk and push it."

Joe thought for a moment.

"I think I can ride the trestle," he said.

"How?" demanded the man.

"By keeping on the steel rail. That's smooth enough."

"You never can do it!" declared the man who had offered the objection. "You never can do it in this world. You'll be off in no time, and it's a long fall to the river. You can't do it!"

"Can't I?" asked Joe coolly. "You come and watch me. I'm going to ride my motor-cycle across the railroad trestle bridge on the single rail!"

Several in the crowd looked at him admiringly, while others shook their heads.

"He'll kill himself!" murmured one old man.

"He sure has got nerve!" exclaimed a boy, admiringly.

Meanwhile a crowd of villagers followed Joe as he rode off in the direction of the railroad. It was his only chance of getting to the circus on time.

## CHAPTER XXI IN STRANGE PERIL

Joe was running his machine at reduced speed as he went off in the direction that had been indicated as the location of the railroad tracks. Beside him ran some of the more fleet-footed of the youths of the town, and behind them came some men. All were hurrying to see if Joe would make good his boast.

Yet, it was not so much a boast as it was a determination to do this risky act in order not to be late at the circus and so disappoint a big crowd and cause trouble for the management.

"It's my own fault for going off so far into the country," mused Joe, "and I've got to make up for it as best I can."

"Turn down here to the railroad," a lad called to Joe. "This is the short cut."

Joe steered his machine down a lane, and he soon saw stretching ahead of him the cinder-covered embankment of a single line of railroad. In the distance Joe could see a big depression where the river ran. The stream itself was not very large, but it flowed at the very bottom of a wide and deep valley, and to cross this a long trestle had been necessary.

"Think you can ride it, young man?" asked an elderly man, as Joe halted, for he had to push the machine up the embankment.

"I'm going to make a big attempt," was the answer. "You see, I'm behind my schedule and I've got to make it up."

"You're taking a big risk."

"Well, I'm used to risks," answered Joe with a smile. "I'm a circus trapeze performer."

"That accounts for part of it," went on the man with a smile. "I wish you luck."

"Thanks," murmured Joe as he began to push the heavy motor-cycle up the embankment. Willing hands assisted him, and he soon stood on the railroad tracks themselves. He found that the road-bed was in good condition. The ties, or sleepers, as the wooden supports of the rails are called, were well embedded in cinders, which had been finely pulverized by the action of the weather and by many feet walking over them, for the railroad tracks were often used as a short cut by the people of the neighborhood.

"This won't be half bad to ride on," said Joe, as he kicked at the cinders.

"No, but the trestle is the sticker," some one remarked. "You can't ride on that without being shaken to pieces on the ties."

"I'm not going to try," Joe said. "As I told you, I'm going to take to a rail."

"You'll never do it!" was the prediction. "I thought you were joking when you said that."

"It's no joke for me if I miss getting to the circus on time," said Joe grimly. "And if you watch you'll at least see me start. I'm not going to guarantee where I'll end," he concluded as he took a careful survey of the trestle which stretched out before him for more than a mile.

Joe was not going into this without having thought carefully of it in advance, in spite of the short time it had taken him to make up his mind. He was used to doing that—thinking and deciding quickly. The very nature of his calling made it necessary for him to do this. One does not have much time to make up one's mind when flying through the air from a high trapeze.

Joe felt reasonably sure that if he could get his machine started at a fast rate of speed, and could get it, at that speed, on top of the smooth, and none too wide, rail, he could hold it there. It is a well-known fact in physics that a body in motion tends to follow a straight line, until forced out of that course by some external force. If a stone is thrown it will go in a straight line until the attraction of the earth's gravitation pulls it down.

But in Joe's case gravitation would have no effect, as he would be on the ground all the while, or what was practically the ground. What he would have to guard against would be a deviation of more than an inch from left or right. If he swerved ever so little, his machine would leave the rail and he would either plunge over the side of the high trestle, or he would

find himself bumping over the ties.

"And I wouldn't want either of those things to happen," mused Joe, with a grim smile on his face.

But Joe Strong knew that a swiftly moving motor-cycle or bicycle has a very strong tendency to follow a straight course. It is easy to keep one's bicycle in a straight line when going fast. There is hardly any need of balancing, and one may ride along even without having the hands on the steering bars.

A motor-cycle moves much faster than a bicycle, and so has a greater chance of keeping in a straight line. This was what Joe was counting on when he proposed to ride on the narrow rail over the high trestle.

He must work rapidly now. It was drawing nearer to the time for the opening of the afternoon performance, and Joe felt that his absence up to this time must be worrying the ring-master, who liked his performers on hand in plenty of time before the show was to open.

Joe looked about for a means of getting up on the rail. It would not do to have some one hold his machine there, and so start. For that would mean his front wheel would swerve more or less because of an endeavor to get his balance, and he would be off the rail almost as soon as he was on it.

"I've got to get a flying start, and hit the rail at a good pace," reasoned Joe. "How can I do it?"

Almost at once the answer came to him. Near the place where he and the curious villagers had mounted to the railroad embankment were some planks. They had been taken out of a cattle-guard, to be replaced by new ones.

"I can make a temporary runway of the old planks," reasoned Joe, "and guide myself to the rail with them."

He quickly explained to the men and boys his need. They grasped the idea at once and began to help.

In a few minutes a platform of planks was laid on either side of a rail where it was spiked to the sleepers which were embedded in the cinders. The trestle started a few feet beyond where the temporary runway, or guiding planks, ended.

Joe used three planks—that is the runway was three planks wide, and they were laid one on either side of the rail, with the middle one directly over the strip of steel. Where the runway came to an end some dirt was used to make an even slope down to the rail, thus taking up the thickness of the plank.

Joe wheeled his machine to the far end of the wooden structure which was made firm by having cinder-dust banked against it. The motor-cycle was held up by willing hands on either side, and Joe started it. With a pop, a rattle and a roar the powerful machine was in motion.

"Let go!" cried Joe, as he threw in the gear.

Off he went. Joe held the handles firm, and his eye was fixed on that shining strip of steel along which—if he had luck—he would soon be speeding.

He opened up the throttle wide. He wanted speed and he needed it as quickly as he could get it, for on speed alone could he depend to keep the machine on the narrow steel path.

Joe heard a shout behind him, and, almost before he knew it, he was at the end of the runway and his front wheel was on the rail.

"So far so good!" thought Joe grimly. If he could only keep the machine there all would be well.

And then began such a ride as probably never before was witnessed. For Joe Strong, holding his machine with firm muscles, his nerves as quiet as only he knew how to make them, his eyes fixed on that shiny strip of steel, was driving his motor-cycle across the high trestle on a single rail.

Below him, at his right hand, was the deep valley, more than a hundred feet down. It was covered with trees and rocks, with here and there a grassy patch.

"If I fall on that side I hope I can pick out a bit of turf to land on," thought Joe. But he did not intend to fall.

Straight and true he held the front wheel. It needed no pressure on the handle bars. It would keep straight of itself now, for the motor-cycle was going at great speed. That alone would keep it in a true course if no pressure from Joe swerved it. And his hands were on the bars with as delicate a touch as a woman might have used.

In about half a minute Joe was out over the stream which the trestle spanned.

"This would be the best place of all to take a tumble," mused the lad. He knew if he did fall here he would at least have a chance for his life. For he could kick the machine away from him, and dive into the water. And he felt that it was not too high a fall to take with comparative safety if there was any depth at all to the stream.

But almost before Joe realized it he had flashed over the water, and he was again speeding over the valley itself, with hard ground, rocks, stones and sharp-pointed trees beneath him.

Of course, in case Joe's machine did leave the rail he might fall on the other side. There would be comparative safety, save that he might be badly cut and bruised by the motor-cycle falling on top of him.

On and on he sped. True to the rail he held the front wheel. He was at the height of his speed now, and every second added to his safety, for the faster he went the nearer true to a straight line could he hold the machine.

"Almost over," thought Joe. A quick glance ahead showed him where the trestle came to an end. He had nearly made good his boast.

It was a good mile across the high trestle, and Joe said afterward that he made it in less than a minute. And he must have done so. That rate of speed was necessary in order to keep the machine straight.

Joe looked down. No longer did he see below him the open ties.

He was over the trestle!

He had done what he had said he would do, and crossed on the rail.

With a movement of the handle bars he sent the front wheel down on the cinder bed. He could ride on a broader path now. A little jar, as first one wheel and then the other left the rail, told him that his daring ride was over.

Joe slowed down, and turned to wave a reassuring hand to the crowd at the other end of the trestle. They waved their hands in return, and doubtless they cheered, though Joe could not hear them, as the wind was in the wrong direction.

"Well, that's over!" he said, thankfully enough, though his heart was beating scarcely faster than if he had done some trapeze act, and his nerves were under perfect control.

"I'm glad I didn't meet any train," thought Joe. But he had inquired of his new friends before undertaking the ride about the time of the trains, and had learned that none was scheduled to cross the trestle for some time. Of course there might have been a special, but that did not happen.

Joe was safe. He rode along the even road-bed for some distance and then, following the directions the villagers had given him, he turned down the embankment into a country road. A little later he was on the highway that led to the town where the circus was showing.

"I'll get there just about in time," thought Joe as he looked at his watch.

"Well, I was just thinking about sending out a searching party for you, Joe," remarked Jim Tracy, as our hero rode swiftly up to the show grounds.

"I'm not late," was the reply.

"No. But it was getting near your time, and I wanted to make sure you were on hand."

"Well, I am," replied Joe. But he did not tell until some time afterward what a narrow escape he had had from being late, nor what a risky ride he had taken.

"Oh, Joe, how dared you do it?" asked Helen, when he mentioned it to her. "How dared you? It was so dangerous!"

"Why, I guess I just didn't think anything at all about the danger," said Joe with a smile. "I knew it was the only way, and so——"

"You took it," finished Helen. "That's just like you, Joe."

Joe went through his trapeze work in the big tent that afternoon with as much vim and vigor as though he had not, an hour before, taken such a chance with his life. And he followed that up by doing his tank act with his usual success. He did not stay under water quite so long, however, as he found that he was tiring a little, and he wanted to save himself for the night's performance, when a bigger crowd would be present.

And at night Joe went two seconds ahead of his previous best record.

"You'll crowd the world's record yet," predicted Jim Tracy.

The show moved on, and at the next town it received an unexpected bit of advertising. For a reporter in the town where Joe had started on his sensational trestle ride had been given the facts by some of the eyewitnesses, to whom Joe had given his name.

The reporter wrote a thrilling story, and it was published in the paper of the city where the circus was billed the following day.

It was not until then that most of Joe's fellow performers heard about his feat, and it made a great sensation.

"Why didn't you save that act for the circus?" asked Jim Tracy. "It would have made a big hit and brought a crowd."

"I didn't have time to stage it properly," Joe said. "I was thinking of saving myself a fine for being late at the show."

But an unusually big crowd came to the show anyhow, brought by having read of Joe's thrilling ride. He was a sort of center of attraction as he went through his trapeze and tank acts.

Unexpected and impulsive as Joe's ride was, it formed the forerunner of what was afterward a big feature in his life, as will appear in due time.

For a week or more the circus moved along its mapped-out route, and nothing of moment occurred. The usual crowds came and went, the performers went through their acts successfully, and Joe and his trained seal did their turns to the great amusement and entertainment of the audiences, as well as satisfaction to the circus management. The swimming of Joe and the seal, the showy goldfish and the general setting of the act made it a most novel one.

"Is there any more word from Benny?" asked Helen one day.

"Nothing definite," Joe said. "He is still in the same condition. I have written to the doctor to make inquiries and find out if there is, in this country or abroad, any new means of treatment that could be given. Often foreign doctors know things those over here haven't heard of yet."

"Oh, I do hope they discover something," sighed Helen. "Poor Benny! I feel so sorry for him!"

The circus grounds in the town of Westford were located near a great reservoir which supplied water to several neighboring municipalities. And Westford was reached by the Sampson Brothers' Show about two weeks after Joe's sensational ride on the trestle.

After breakfast Joe and Helen strolled about the grounds, and having seen that the performing horse and the glass tank had reached the grounds safely, Joe proposed that he and Helen go for a little motor-cycle ride.

"But you'll have to promise not to take me over any railroad trestles," Helen warned him.

"I'll promise," agreed Joe.

They did not go far, and on their way back, as they passed the reservoir, they saw a big crowd gathered on the bank near a gate-house.

"Looks as if something was going on," said Joe, stopping the machine.

"Maybe some one is rivaling you in a high diving stunt," said Helen, half playfully.

They alighted and made their way into the throng.

"What's up?" asked Joe of a man.

"A diver is caught down in the outlet pipe," was the unexpected answer.

"A diver!" repeated Joe.

"Yes. A man in a diving suit went down to fix something that went wrong with one of the valves, and they can't get him up. He's been down several hours now and they're afraid he's dead!"

## CHAPTER XXII

### A DEEP DIVE

"What is it?" asked Helen, who had not understood what Joe's informant had said.

"It's a diver caught down at the mouth of the outlet pipe of the reservoir," the man explained. "They're trying to get him up but they don't seem to get him."

"Why not?" Joe wanted to know.

"Because they can't pull any harder on the life line than they have been pulling for fear either of breaking the line or of injuring the diver. And they have to be careful, too, of fouling his air hose. If that breaks it would be death for him."

"How terrible!" exclaimed Helen. "Can nothing be done to save him?"

"They're trying everything they can think of, Miss," was the man's answer. "The water company has sent for another diver to go down and see what the trouble is, but it will be half a day before he can get here, and by that time——"

He did not finish, but Joe and Helen knew what was meant.

The big crowd about the reservoir was excited, and yet it was a tense, quiet sort of excitement. It was a grim waiting for what might, at any moment, happen. Either the diver would be hauled up, or he would perish deep down there under the calm water.

"How did it happen?" asked Joe. The man seemed to know considerable about the accident.

"It was this way," he replied. "The reservoir is a new one, and it hasn't worked just right since the water was let in. That is, the main supply pipe, by which the water goes out to other and smaller pipes to be distributed to the different municipalities, gets clogged up every now and then.

"At first they thought it was because some refuse matter, left on the ground when the reservoir was built, had gotten into the valves. But a diver went down and found there was something the matter with the valves themselves. They open and close the valves from the gate house over there," and he indicated it, standing on the main dam wall of the big reservoir.

"After the diver found what was wrong," the man went on, "the water concern planned to have it fixed, and for some days now the work has been going on. The diver would go down, his tools would be lowered to him, and he has been working under water. You see they don't want to let the water out of the reservoir because it would leave some towns without a supply, which would be dangerous, if even for a day.

"So the diver has been working down there, and it's pretty deep, too, about forty feet. There's a good deal of pressure at that depth, though of course divers have gone deeper."

"Yes," assented Joe. "And how did the accident happen?"

"Nobody knows, exactly. Tom Rand, the diver, went down as usual this morning, and his tools were let down to him. But he hadn't been down long, as I understand it, before he signaled to be hauled up. He signaled in a hurry, too, so something must have happened.

"The men at the air pump and the helpers tried to get him up, but they couldn't. He was stuck down there, and, as I said, they don't dare pull too hard for fear of cutting him in two, making a hole in the diving suit, or breaking the rope. They don't know what to do."

"Why, this is terrible!" exclaimed Helen.

"Yes, Miss, it certainly is. To think of that poor man, caught down under the water in some way and not able to be got up. Of course he can breathe, for the air hose is still working, and the men are at the pump constantly. But it's impossible to stand that pressure very long at a time, and he'll soon give out from exhaustion, if nothing else happens. They've sent for another diver, but, as I said, he'll be some time getting here, and then it may be too late."

"Isn't there another diving suit to be had?" asked Joe.

"No," the man answered.

Helen looked at Joe. She read the thought that was in his mind.

"Did you ever go down in a diving suit?" she asked him in a low voice.

"No, but I'd take a chance if they had one. However, as there isn't I can't. But perhaps——"

Joe was interrupted by a shout from the crowd. He and Helen, with the man who had been giving them the information, stood a little to one side.

"Hello!" exclaimed Joe, "I wonder what happened then?"

"Come with me and we'll find out," proposed the man. "I can take you over to the gate house where the diver's helpers are at work. I'm a member of the town water committee," he went on. "You folks are with the circus, aren't you?"

"Yes," Joe answered. "But we won't have much of a crowd at the afternoon show if they all stay here at the reservoir to see the diver rescued."

"That's right," conceded Mr. Blair, as he said his name was. "But we'll go and see what happened. I can take you in all right."

They made their way through the crowd, which was thronged as near to the scene of the

accident as the men and boys, women and girls, could get. Several constables stood on guard, but at a nod from Mr. Blair they let him pass, with Joe and Helen.

"Oh, Joe!" she murmured, as she held his arm. "I'm so afraid something dreadful will happen."

"Perhaps not," he answered reassuringly.

They found the men at the pump and the other helpers very much excited, and it was this excitement which had communicated itself to the crowd.

"What happened?" asked Mr. Blair. "Are you getting him up?"

"I only wish we were," wearily said a man who was at the signal line. "We've not been able to move him an inch, and just now he signaled for more air. I'm afraid something has gone wrong down there—I mean something new. Maybe his suit is punctured and he's being drowned."

"Oh, if we could only do something!" exclaimed Mr. Blair. He stood with Joe, just outside the gate house. On the broad top of the dam, a few feet above the surface of the water, the pumping apparatus was set up. Near it were the tools used by the diver in the repair work.

Going down into the water was the air hose, through which oxygen was supplied. A few bubbles rising to the surface told that the hose was still connected with the diver's helmet. In addition to the hose a light but strong line led into the water. A man held this in his hand, and it was by a series of jerks on this that the diver below communicated with his helpers above. Then there was a heavy rope made fast to a ring in the wall. The other end was attached to the diver's belt.

And these three things—a rope, a line and a hose descending into the mysterious water—were the only links that connected the diver with life. That he was still alive was evident, for now and then there came a feeble pull on the life-line.

Two men had hold of the heavy rope, the end of which was in the diver's belt, and, from time to time, they pulled on it, hoping that the unfortunate man had been able to free himself, so he could be pulled up.

But the rope remained taut—it did not give. The diver was still caught in the outlet pipe—just how no one could say.

"Can't they drain the reservoir?" asked Joe. "Surely, to save a life, the towns could do without water for a while."

"Oh, we'd drain it in a minute if we could," said Mr. Blair. "But you see now we can't get the main outlet pipe open. It's in that one that the diver is stuck. Only a little water is now flowing through it. We have opened all the small outlets we can, but it will take three or four days to empty the reservoir through them."

"Three or four days," murmured Joe. "And in the meanwhile——"

He did not care to finish the sentence.

Again came a quick signal on the life-line.

"He wants more air!" cried the man who interpreted the jerks. "Give him more air, boys!"

The men at the wheel of the air pump worked it faster. Though why an increased pressure was wanted no one knew.

"Helen," said Joe in a low voice, "I'm going to try to save that man. I can't bear to stand here and think he may be slowly dying down there," and he pointed to the calm water, unruffled save by the few escaping bubbles of air.

"But how can you?" asked the girl. "There isn't another diving suit to be had here, Joe, even if you were used to one."

"I'll go down without one!" declared Joe. "In fact, I think I can work better without one than in one. I'm going down and try to save him!"

"Oh, if you only can!" she answered. "It would be great! But you will be careful—won't you?"

Joe nodded. Helen did not ask him not to go. She knew Joe too well for that. The young circus performer stepped up to Mr. Blair.

"If they'll let me," said Joe, "I'd like to go down and try to free that diver from whatever is holding him."

"You go down? Are you a diver?"

"Not the kind that uses a suit, no. But I do a diving and tank act in the circus."

Joe's offer and his talk had aroused instant attention from the crowd about him and from the



men at the air pumps and life-line.

"I guess you'll find, young man, brave and generous as your offer is," said one of the air-pumpers, "that diving in a circus tank is some different from going down forty feet."

"I realize that," said Joe quietly.

"And what about holding your breath?" asked Mr. Blair. "Can you do it?"

"He can hold it for nearly four and a half minutes," said Helen quickly.

"Whew!" whistled one of the diver's helpers. He knew what that record meant.

"If you'll let me, I'll go down without a suit," offered Joe. "I'm not saying I can save your man, but I simply can't stand here and let him die without making an effort."

"Good for you!" cried one of the pump-men. "Some of us tried to go down, but we couldn't fetch that far, not being able to hold our breath. If you'll try, it will be the only chance poor Tom has, for he can't last much longer, and by the time the other diver gets here—well, it'll be too late, that's all. Go ahead, young man, and try."

Murmurs of appreciation greeted Joe's announcement. There was a hurried consultation among the members of the town water committee, of which Mr. Blair was one.

"Shall I go down?" asked Joe.

"Yes!" cried Mr. Blair. "Go, and we'll all pray that you may be successful," he added solemnly. "It is a terrible thing to stand by and know a fellow being is dying, as Rand may be," and he motioned to the water, still gently agitated by the air bubbles.

Joe Strong lost no time. He was told there were some old clothes in the gate house which he could use, and soon, attired in a pair of trousers cut off short and in an old shirt, he took his place on the reservoir wall just above the spot where the lifeline disappeared in the water.

It was going to be a deep dive, and Joe knew it. And now, if ever, was the time for him to break the record in holding his breath. For he might be able to free the diver in a few seconds, or it might take minutes.

Joe inflated and deflated his lungs several times. The crowd watched him as if fascinated. Helen caught Joe's glance and nodded encouragingly to him, but there was a look of anxiety on her face.

"If Joe should be caught as the diver is," she thought for a flash. And then she dismissed the dreadful idea, for she dared not dwell on it.

"Well, I'm ready," said Joe, after a pause.

"May you succeed!" whispered Mr. Blair.

Joe took in a long breath—the longest, he felt, he had ever taken. Then he made his deep dive.

## **CHAPTER XXIII**

### **BROUGHT TO LIFE**

Down through the limpid depths of the great reservoir of water went Joe Strong. He was swimming toward the bottom as fast as he could go, for he wanted to get there quickly and begin the work of rescue, and he knew every second counted.

He had his eyes open, of course, and he was glad the sun was shining brightly overhead, so he could have light to work by. In forty feet of water not much sunlight penetrates, even on a bright day, but Joe had been told that the diver had a small electric light with him, and this, perhaps, would still be glowing. The current was turned on, that Joe knew, but the lamp might have been broken in the accident that had happened.

Down, down, down went the young diver—a veritable "boy fish" now if ever there was such a thing. Joe had a glimpse of the air hose, like some long, thin water snake, beside him. It went down into the depths, as did the life-line and the thicker hoisting rope.

"And where they end—there's the diver," reasoned Joe. He used the air hose as a guide and swam as near to it as he could. In a few seconds he found himself nearing the bottom of the reservoir. It was of natural formation, for the dam had been built across a narrow valley, and when the water came in, it covered from view the site of a small forest, much of which had been cleared away, leaving only stumps and rocks.

Suddenly, before Joe's eyes, loomed a strange shape. It was almost like that of some deep-sea monster, with great, round, staring, glassy eyes, and as Joe turned a somersault and landed on his feet he stood beside the imprisoned diver. The latter was aware of something unusual going on, and turned to stare at Joe through the glass of his helmet. Joe could not see the man's face in that light, but he knew it must show deadly fear.

In a trice Joe decided what he must do. It was not easy to stay beneath the water, for his natural buoyancy had a tendency to force him up, and his first act, after landing and feeling himself shooting back toward the surface, was to reach out and grasp the heavy rope that he knew was fastened about the diver's waist. There could be no harm to the diver in this, Joe reasoned, since the men up above were putting a much greater strain on the hempen cable. And by holding thus to the rope Joe prevented himself from going up.

Though the diver must have been greatly astonished to see a young man in a pair of old trousers and a ragged shirt suddenly appear beside him in the reservoir, Tom Rand could show nothing of what he felt. Talking was out of the question.

Suddenly the water about Joe and the diver was illuminated, and Joe looked to see the electric, waterproof light glowing. The diver had turned the switch to give his rescuer every chance to work.

And in that light Joe saw what the trouble was. One of the diver's leaden-weighted feet was caught in the valve of the pipe in such a way that he was held a prisoner. No wonder the men up above had not been able to pull loose Tom Rand. To do so they would have had to pull apart his diving suit, or at least pull off one leg of it, and this would have meant drowning the diver.

Joe, holding to the heavy rope, was a few feet off the bottom of the reservoir now. To work effectively he must stand directly on the bottom, and he must be held down in some way. When a diver makes a descent he is pulled down by shoes which are heavily weighted with lead. Otherwise the buoyancy of the diving dress, filled as it is with air, would send him to the surface. And in Joe's case his human body, with his lungs inflated with air, would have come up after his dive had he not held himself down. But he must seek a new means of hold, if he was to work to release the unfortunate man.

Joe looked down at the water-covered ground, now illuminated by the electric light. He saw just what he needed. Near the outlet pipe, in the valve of which the diver's foot was caught, was an old stump. There was a root exposed—a root with a sort of loop—and under this Joe thrust one foot. It was almost like the stirrup of a saddle, only instead of holding Joe's foot up, the root held it down.

"Now I can have both my hands free," thought Joe, as he fixed his foot firmly in the loop of the root.

Joe looked through the glass-windowed copper helmet. He could see the man's face now, and on it was a look of horror, mingled with new and sudden hope.

The boy fish pointed to the valve in the outlet pipe, and made a motion as though prying on a crowbar. He wanted to indicate that he needed some sort of lever to work with.

Tom Rand understood at once, and slightly nodded his big head. Then he stooped down and, after feeling about in the mud near his uncaught foot, he picked up a short bar of iron.

Joe nodded to show that was what he wanted, and he moved as close as he dared to where the lead-weighted foot was caught. Joe had to be careful in two respects. He did not dare go too near the pipe, for a stream of water was rushing through it and there was considerable suction, though not as much as there would be when the valve was fully opened. And Joe's feet, not being encased in big rubber boots, were small enough to be drawn into the same hole where Rand's was caught.

The diver was standing with most of his weight on his left foot. It was the right one that was caught, and this was thrust forward and outward, at an angle of about forty-five degrees from the upright one. And it was being caught in this peculiar position that had prevented the diver from aiding himself.

He could not lean forward far enough to bring effective pressure on the iron lever that had been lowered to him, or he might have pried his own foot loose, or have opened the valve wide enough to enable him to withdraw it.

"And he's been standing in that painful position for hours," thought Joe, "trying to help himself and not being able to. No wonder he wanted more air. He must be pretty nearly exhausted with the water pressure and the horror of it all."

Joe himself was suffering from the weight of water and from the labor of holding his breath. This labor was increased at the depth in which he was. It was deeper than he had ever gone down before—five times as deep as his glass tank in the circus.

Joe took the iron bar in both hands and worked himself as near to the outlet pipe as he dared go.

One end of the bar was pointed, and Joe inserted this between the lead sole of the diver's boot and pried cautiously. He was working as fast as he could, and he realized that more than a minute of his precious four—or, at best, four and a half—had passed. And he had only begun. Could he stand it? Could he hold his breath long enough to make the rescue?

"I will do it! I will!" Joe told himself down there under the water.

Several times he put all the weight he could bring to bear on the iron bar, and Joe was well muscled. But the foot was still held fast. Joe was afraid of using too much force for fear of making a hole in the boot, or of causing the diving suit to leak. But the foot would not stir.

Joe wished he had a longer bar, so he could get more leverage, but there was no time to signal for one. Nor could Tom Rand help him by pressing on the end. The diver could not lean forward far enough.

"I've got to do it all by myself," thought Joe grimly.

Again and again he pried with all the force he dared use. Something tapped him on the shoulder. He looked around to see the diver beckoning to him. Joe leaned back and saw, by the motions made by Rand's fingers, that the diver was trying to tell him to pry on the valve itself.

Joe turned back to his work again. His heart was beating like a hammer now. Every muscle ached with the strain and his head felt as if it would burst. Joe knew he must have passed the four-minute period. How much longer could he stay under?

Not long, he feared. He had about reached his limit in this depth of water. He felt that he simply must let out a breath and draw in——

No! He couldn't do that. To breathe in now would mean slow suffocation. He must hold out.

He put the pointed end of the iron lever in a crack in the valve. He pressed with all his available strength. Nothing gave. Again Joe shoved down. His head seemed to swim, and it was black before his eyes. Still the imprisoned foot was caught.

Once more Joe pressed, and then, to his joy, he felt something give way. So suddenly did it happen that the bar fell from his hand. Then came a great rush of water. Joe had opened the valve so wide that the water was flowing out in a great volume.

He felt himself being sucked forward. Desperately he forced himself back. His foot, held under the root, seemed as if it would be torn from his leg.

Then he felt great arms about him. He knew them to be those of the diver. In the light of the electric lamp Joe saw the man pull his leg loose, and then, while consciousness almost left Joe, he felt himself being carried toward the surface.

The diver had been able to free himself when Joe opened the valve. In an instant he had signaled to be pulled up, and as he shot toward the surface, seeing Joe's great danger he had clasped him in his arms. Together the rescuer and rescued were pulled up, and an instant later Joe, who felt that he simply could not hold his breath another fraction of a second, found himself in the air and gulped in great mouthfuls of it. Oh, what a relief it was! For a moment, in the great need of it, he forgot what he had done.

But others did not forget it, and no sooner was it seen that the diver, alive, was out of the underwater trap, and that Joe, in his arms, had also come up, than a great cheer was shouted forth.

Eager hands lifted Joe and the diver to the top of the dam, and while some supported Joe, who was quite weak, others began to loosen the diver's helmet, for, until this was done, it was necessary to pump air to him.

Then a doctor, who had been in readiness to give aid in case the rescue was made in time, came up to minister to both of those who seemed to have come back from the edge of a watery grave.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### NEW HOPE

Joe's first realization, after he had regained his nearly spent breath and accepted a blanket which he wrapped around him, was that Helen was standing near him, holding his hand.

"Oh, Joe!" she murmured. "I am so glad—so glad—and proud of you!"

He smiled, rather a weak smile it is true, but it was a smile.

"Better look out," he said. "I'll get you wet."

"I don't care," she replied.

"She wouldn't go away," said Mr. Blair, who had Joe's other hand and was vigorously shaking it. "I tried to make her go when—when four minutes passed and you didn't come up. We thought maybe you were caught fast, too."

"Was I down four minutes?" asked Joe.

"Four minutes and forty seconds," said Helen. "I kept track by my wrist watch. It was awful, Joe, to see the seconds ticking off. I could hardly do it—but—I did," she finished with a smile.

"Four minutes and forty seconds," murmured Joe. "Then I've beaten the world's record."

"Yes," said Helen.

"If it had only been in the circus tank," Joe went on. "It would have been a big advertisement for the show."

"I fancy you'll get advertisement enough out of it as it is," said Mr. Blair significantly, as he glanced at the enthusiastic crowd which the constables had hard work to prevent from overwhelming Joe, the diver and others on the wall of the reservoir. "And here come the newspaper men to have a talk with you. They've been here ever since word went out that the diver was held down there under the water."

But Dr. Wertz, who had been giving some medicine to the diver, now came over to Joe and insisted on examining him before he would allow the reporters to interview the boy fish.

"Oh, I'm all right," Joe said. "Thank you just the same. All I need is a little fresh air."

"But my dear young man, you were under water a long while—nearly five minutes. You may be injured."

"Oh, I guess not," Joe said. "I am used to it, you see," and he quickly explained.

"Ach! So? Yes!" exclaimed Dr. Wertz, who spoke at times with a pronounced German accent. "And have you felt no ill effects of the water pressure on your vocal chords or your ear drums?"

"Why, no, I haven't," said Joe, and a strange thought came into his mind. "You see, I haven't been at it long. But a friend of mine was disabled from doing the act I'm doing in the circus."

"So? I think I should like to have a talk with you, young man, about yourself and that friend of yours when there is time," said Dr. Wertz. "Just now let me look you over."

He took Joe into the gate house, to which the diver had already been carried. Tom Rand, whose diving suit had been removed, was lying on an improvised bed. He seemed weak and ill, but he held out a rather trembling hand to Joe.

"I guess you're the chap who saved my life," he said slowly. "I can't thank you—now—too nearly all in. But I—I guess you know how I feel about it."

"Sure—yes," answered Joe. "It's an even deal. You grabbed me just in time or I'd have been in that pipe, too."

The diver nodded.

"It was a close call," he said.

Arrangements were being made to take the diver to the local hospital. He was not seriously hurt, only he had been under a strain and needed rest and quiet. The physician looked Joe over.

"Well, I can't find anything the matter with you," he said with a smile. "You certainly are a marvel at holding your breath, though. Nearly five minutes! I don't see how you did it."

"Just practice, I guess," Joe answered. "Then, too, I made up my mind I wasn't coming up without him," and he nodded toward Tom Rand.

While Joe was dressing, after vigorously rubbing himself, the diver was taken away. Dr. Wertz accompanied him, and promised to see Joe again, for our hero had certain questions he wanted to ask the physician.

Joe then gave the newspaper men the chance they had been waiting for. Several of them had flocked to the scene of the accident as soon as it was known that something mysterious had happened to the diver. And Joe was in a position to tell exactly what the situation was down under the water, though he had not yet heard just how the diver came to be caught.

Joe described his own work modestly enough, but the newspaper men were shrewd enough to guess what Joe had left out, and one may be sure, in the writing of the story, they omitted none of the thrills.

It was a "big story" and soon was being telegraphed over the country, though, of course, the local papers made the most of it, spreading it entirely across their front pages, using big headlines. Joe's picture was snapped by several photographers, one having secured a view of Joe in his ragged trousers and old shirt—the improvised bathing suit.

"Well, I suppose we might as well be getting back to the circus," said Joe to Helen, when he could get away from the reporters and photographers. An admiring crowd of boys followed him as he made his way out to his motor-cycle.

"Are you going on with your act—after what you have gone through with?" asked Helen in surprise.

"Why not?" Joe asked in some astonishment. "No one else can take my place, can he?"

"No, but I should think you'd be so exhausted that you couldn't perform."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Joe easily; but, truth to tell, he did feel the strain. "I may not try to break any under-water records," he went on, "but I'll do all the rest of it."

Some of the circus folk had witnessed the sensational rescue by Joe, and when he and Helen reached the circus grounds our hero was met by Jim Tracy.

"What's this I hear about you?" asked the ringmaster.

"Nothing bad, I hope," answered Joe with a smile.

"I should say not! Say! this will be the biggest card you ever had, or the circus either. Wait until you see what happens, Joe."

And something did happen.

Jim had the whole story from the early editions of the papers, which sold in great numbers on the circus grounds. Of course, there was a record breaking crowd at the show, for the story had spread that the young rescuer of the imprisoned diver was the boy fish who performed in the glass tank with the seal, and reserved seats near Joe's platform were at a premium.

Joe spoke to the ringmaster, saying he thought he would not try for a very long under-water stay that afternoon, as his chest hurt him a little.

"I should say you wouldn't try!" exclaimed Jim. "I wouldn't let you. And don't work on the trapeze at all. Just do as much of your tank act as you can."

"Oh, I can do all that," Joe said quickly, "and string it out a bit if I cut out the trapeze work."

"Cut it out, then—at least for to-day."

When Jim Tracy made his usual announcement about Joe, before the boy fish entered the tank, there was a burst of applause at the mention of our hero's name, some one called out:

"Three cheers for the pluckiest lad in seven counties!"

There was a roar from the big crowd in the circus tent, and Joe blushing bowed his thanks. The papers had made his bravery known to every one, and there was a craning of necks to see him.

It was a relief to Joe to swim about in the tank after what he had done in the forty feet of water, and he floated about with Lizzie, doing graceful turns, exhibiting some of his tricks, and eating under water. The seal seemed to show much affection for her young owner, and took piece after piece of fish from his hand beneath the surface.

Joe's act was applauded again and again, and he had to take several curtain calls, though, of course, there was no curtain in the circus.

"It went well, Joe! It was big!" whispered Jim Tracy, as our hero went to his dressing-room after the act was over. "It's the biggest card yet. I'm going to have new posters printed, showing you rescuing the diver."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that."

"Sure I will. And say, Joe, if you want to ask for more money I won't object," and the ringmaster smiled.

"Well, I can always use it," Joe replied.

Jim Tracy nodded, but he wondered what Joe was doing with his large salary—that is, large in circus circles.

At night an even larger crowd came to the circus, and Joe's act seemed the center of attraction. He was glad, not only on his own account, but because it helped to advertise the circus.

Jim Tracy made a hasty change in plans and stayed two more days in the town where Joe had made the rescue, since it was the center of a large community. And each additional day and night saw the big tent jammed. Joe's fame was spreading.

He called on Tom Rand in the hospital, and was glad to find the diver much improved. Rand explained how the accident had happened.

He was adjusting the valve, which was impossible to work from the gate house above, when his foot slipped in the mud. As the pipe was partly open, his leaden-soled boot became jammed in the crack. Try as he did, he could not get loose, and he was losing hope when Joe came swimming down to him.

"I thought at first you were a big fish, such as I've often seen in my ocean-diving work," said the man. "And when I had a good look at you I sure was startled."

"Well, they call me the boy fish," Joe said with a smile.

Dr. Wertz was at the hospital, and shook his head at seeing Joe.

"I can't understand why you aren't suffering from your under-water work," said the physician. "I am, as perhaps you know, engaged by the company for whom Mr. Rand works. It employs several divers, and on tasks where there is a risk I am always on hand to be ready to aid the men if necessary. That is why I happened to be at the reservoir."

"I have made a study of diseases and ailments brought on by water pressure and diving work, and I wonder you do not show some signs of ear or throat trouble."

"I'd like to talk to you about that," said Joe. "The young man whose place I took is suffering from that. He is going deaf and dumb, they tell me," and Joe gave all the details of Benny's case.

"And you say they have given up hope of curing him?" asked Dr. Wertz.

"Yes," said Joe. "Can it be done? Would an operation help?"

"It would," said the physician quickly. "I have not done it myself, nor do I feel justified in attempting it. But there is a fellow countryman of mine, now in New York, who has operated most successfully. His fees are high, not necessarily for himself, but a complicated apparatus is necessary, and it takes several assistants and nurses who must be paid. I have no doubt but if Dr. Hassenberg operated on your friend he could cure him!"

"Then," said Joe slowly, "I wish you would arrange it for me. I want Benny cured!"

## **CHAPTER XXV**

### **GOOD NEWS**

These were busy days in the circus. Again the end of the season was drawing near. Fall was at hand, and in some places the Sampson Brother's Show had to compete with county fairs with their exhibitions of big pumpkins, fat pigs and monster ears of corn, to say nothing of the horse-racing.

But the circus with which Joe traveled did good business. And it is not exaggerating to say that a good deal of it was due to Joe's fame. For his rescue of the diver had been heralded over all the country, and particularly in the section where the circus was then playing.

Crowds came daily and nightly to see Joe in the tank with the trained seal, and now, more than ever, persons were taking out their watches and timing Joe's stay under water.

He had resumed that feature of his exhibition, and though he never again equaled his record of four minutes and forty seconds, he several times stayed under for thirty-seven seconds beyond the four minutes, thus evening up with the record established as a world's record—that is, so far as is known.

Now and then Joe introduced something new in the way of a trick, for he still kept up his sleight-of-hand practice, not knowing when it might be useful. He could not do much of that under water, but what he did do was novel in effect. Lizzie, too, was very teachable, and she and Joe became great friends. It may seem queer to have a seal for a pet, but they are very intelligent animals, and, unlike a fish, they can live out of water.

Joe heard from Tom Rand, the diver. He had fully recovered and was again back at his perilous calling. He wrote to Joe thanking him for having saved his life, but, as has been said, Joe rather counted it an even thing for had the diver not caught him in time our hero would certainly have been drawn into the pipe and killed.

The water committee of the town also passed a vote of thanks to Joe for his work, for he had saved them large expense and perhaps a suit for damages in case the diver had been drowned.

It was the last few weeks of the circus. Joe had been working hard, and so had Helen, for she had introduced some new effects with her trick horse. Joe had given up most of his trapeze work to devote more time to his tank, but he still did a few of his most thrilling feats on the bars.

"Let's go for a ride," he said to Helen one day, as he brought out his motor-cycle. "It's too nice to stay around the lot. I'll get you back in time."

"Please do," she urged. "And don't leave me in order to go diving in reservoirs, either."

"I won't," Joe promised.

They rode off through the beautiful country, and when it was nearing noon Joe turned about.

"Why are you in such a hurry to get back?" asked Helen. "We don't go on until nearly three o'clock, and we aren't far from the grounds."

"I'm expecting a telegram," Joe said, "and I want to be on hand when it comes."

"A telegram," repeated Helen. "Oh, Joe! is it about your mother's estate in England?"

Joe shook his head.

"I guess there isn't any estate," he said. "I've given up hope of that. No, this is something else."

But he offered no explanation, and though Helen felt, in view of their friendship, that he might tell her, still she did not ask.

As they reached the circus grounds and Joe was putting away his motor-cycle, he saw Tonzo Lascalla coming toward him.

"Well, and how is the millionaire to-day?" asked the trapeze performer.

"Millionaire?" asked Joe, in some surprise.

"Why, yes, you must be that since you get so much money and are never known to spend any," returned the Spaniard.

There was a sneer on his face, and his words showed how much contempt he thought he felt for Joe.

"You must have money in the bank," put in Sid, coming up just then.

"Well, suppose I have?" asked Joe, with a tinge of anger in the words, "I earn what I get, don't I?"

"Oh, you may," replied Tonzo, with a shrug of his shoulders. "You certainly keep what you get—that is sure."

"Of a certainty, yes!" chimed in Sid. "Not once have you treated the crowd on the strength of your increases in salary."

"No," returned Joe slowly, "I haven't, that's a fact. And now I want to say one thing. I know you fellows have been calling me a 'tight-wad' and all that. I stood for it because——"

At that moment a dusty youth came pushing his way up to Joe, the Lascallas and some others of the circus folk who had formed a group about the boy fish. The youth was in the uniform of a telegraph messenger, and he pushed a dusty wheel, chewing gum the while.

"Say, where's Joe Strong?" he asked of no one in particular. "I've got a wire for him. Is he de guy what does dat tank act? Say! dat's swell, all right. I'd like to see dat, I would!"

He took off his cap, and from the top extracted a telegram and a receipt sheet.

"I'm Joe Strong," said our hero quietly.

"G'wan!" answered the messenger. "Why, he must be a big guy to do all de bills says he does—rescuin' a diver an' all dat! G'wan!"

There was a laugh, but others assured the boy that Joe could make good his claim to identity.

"Sign dis," the messenger said, extending the telegram and receipt blank to Joe. The boy fish hurriedly scribbled his name, and then tore open the envelope. As he read a look of surprise and joy showed on his face.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "This is good news! Now, fellows, I'll tell you why I wouldn't spend my money treating you. I wanted to, badly enough, but I had other ways for my cash. Now I can

tell you, since it's all over and a success. But first let me read you this."

He held up the message and read:

"Operation an entire success. Benny will both hear and speak. He can rejoin circus by next season and do tank work if he likes."

"Who's that from?" asked Helen, coming up in time to hear the message.

"From the celebrated surgeon—a friend of Dr. Wertz," said Joe. "I hired him to operate on Benny Turton to save him from becoming deaf and dumb. It took a lot of money, but I'm glad I had it saved. And that's why I had to pose as—a 'tight-wad,' fellows."

Joe's voice faltered, but there was a happy look on his face.

Tonzo Lascalla stepped forward. He held out his hand and said:

"I want to beg your pardon, Joe Strong. I have misjudged you!"

"So have I!" exclaimed Sid.

They were both very much in earnest, and as they shook hands there were tears in Joe's eyes. But they were happy tears. Others of the circus folk who had not understood Joe made haste to make amends, and, for a time, there was a happy group.

"And I didn't understand, either," said Helen softly as she and Joe walked away, together. "I thought you might be wasting your money foolishly. Oh, Joe, I am so happy!"

The news of Benny's recovery soon spread, and there was rejoicing among the circus folk, for the "human fish" had many friends.

"What does it all mean?" asked Jim Tracy.

"It just means that when I knew Benny needed an operation I began saving my salary to pay for it, since I knew he couldn't," said Joe. "I made him that promise, and I also promised to send to his mother each week what he had been in the habit of sending her. So, in spite of earning a big salary, I didn't have much of it for myself."

"I see," murmured the ringmaster.

"When the first doctor said there was no chance, even with an operation, for Benny's recovery, I was discouraged. But when the diver's physician talked to me I had more hope, and I got him to engage the specialist for Benny. He took charge of all the arrangements, and now the good news comes. Benny will recover and can again be the tank actor."

Jim Tracy scratched his head.

"I don't know about that," he said. "Of course, we'll take Benny back, but he may have to get a new act. We don't want to give you up—you and your seal. The circus needs you."

"To tell you the truth," said Joe, "I am thinking of giving it up."

"Giving it up!" cried the ring-master.

"Yes. I don't want what happened to Benny to happen to me. I'll finish out the season with you, of course, but after that——"

"What are you going to do?" asked Tracy.

"I'm planning some new turns," Joe said. And those of you who are interested in them and in Joe Strong are invited to follow his fortunes in the next volume of this series, to be called: "Joe Strong on the High Wire; Or, Motor-Cycle Perils of the Air."

"Well, we sure will hate to lose you," said Jim Tracy, "but I'm glad Benny will get well and come back to us."

"So am I," said Joe softly.

Somewhere in the circus tent a bugle blew. At once all over the circus grounds there were signs of activity.

"Pretty nearly time to start," observed the ring-master.

"Yes," agreed Joe. "And I'm going to try for the long record this afternoon—as long as when I was in the reservoir with diver Tom Rand."

"Good!" exclaimed Jim Tracy. "I hope you do it."

A little later Joe, in his red, scaly suit, was in the glass tank with the goldfish and the trained seal, while all about were throngs of wondering persons marveling at the endurance powers of the boy fish.

And so, for a time, we will take leave of Joe Strong.



The End.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JOE STRONG, THE BOY FISH; OR,  
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