

CIRCUS STUFF

A Short Story by Frank Condon

Illustrated by Henry Raleigh.

O MAR GILL describes himself as unlucky, but that is not the truth. As a miraculously gifted speller of the well known beans Omar stands absolutely alone, by himself and without a peer. He is a genius and nobody can deny it, and, just to prove it, take that long, dry and discouraging series of incidents up in the San Dimas Valley, when we tried to blow the breath of life into the Bernal P. Tufts Mammoth Circus.

Well do I remember our initial meeting with Bernal P. Tufts and his merry men.

Coming down the San Dimas Valley, we found the asphalt bubbling gently in the noonday sun, with the mercury trying to make out it was a red knitting needle, and we likewise encountered the town of Amalfi, Calif., where we tried to pursue secret and scientific investigations. Our personnel included Harmony Childs, leading steerer; myself and Omar. We fooled around Amalfi, attracted undue attention and came to a distinct understanding with the Chief of Police, who was a petulant and impulsive old wolf.

"I'm givin' you swindlers one hour to leave town," he said, facing the three of us. "One hour."

WE THEREUPON assumed a dignified demeanor and started south on foot, following the state highway and having no particular destination. Eight miles from Amalfi we observed a cloud of dust on the horizon, and when we came up with it we discerned a one-night stand circus caravan at a halt. The baggage wagon was in the ditch, and the proprietor of the circus was telling its driver what he thought, in burning words of one syllable. Harmony suddenly exclaimed: "If that ain't Bernal P. Tufts I'm a goat. He owes me eight hundred dollars." I followed his pointing finger toward the little chap who was cursing. He was a red-faced man with white eyebrows, and as bald as a Chinese egg.

"From the appearance of this circus," remarked Omar, "if he owns it, he's going to keep on owing you the eight hundred. To me this looks like a circus that hasn't much to live for."

"He's owed me eight hundred dollars since that time in Butte," Harmony continued. "When I saw him last he said he was going to pay me the following week. Let's go over and see about it."

IT WAS a discouraging moment to see any man about an old debt. The baggage wagon was deep in the ditch, the trunks were tumbled here and there, and Bernal P. Tufts was rapidly approaching apoplexy.

"Hello, Bernal," Harmony began. "How's the circus business?"

Mr. Tufts stared more closely at our leader. Then his red and steamy countenance relaxed itself in a brief grin.

"Harmony Childs," he said. "Harmony?"

They shook hands, we were introduced, and the circus man returned at once to his job. While he swore, we gazed in surprise at the rest of the caravan. Probably four men were tugging at the back wheels of that overturned baggage wagon. On the remaining vehicles the drivers sat mute, motionless, and bored, and behind them, spreading down the road, the circus performers patiently waited, all very languid, unconcerned and inert. Occasionally they gave us a caustic glance.

"Why don't you get the rest of your hired men to help?" Harmony naturally asked.

"Them?" returned Tufts in disgust, looking at his circus. "They wouldn't give a glass of water to a dying fish. They won't help me."

"Why not?"

"Because they're mad at me," said Tufts, scowling.

"That's too bad," said Omar at this point. "We might as well give the men a hand, hey?"

This idea suited Tufts, so we pitched in, and in no time at all we had the wagon on its four wheels and loaded anew, while the jaded and sulky performers regarded us with scorn.

"Can you drive four horses?" Mr. Tufts inquired.

Harmony answered that any one of us could drive eight horses and probably twelve.

"Git up on that wagon," said Tufts, and then he chased the blundering Swede away, and we all climbed aboard, with Tufts sitting beside Harmony. The caravan started, and Mr. Tufts maintained an earnest conversation with Harmony all the way into Linda Vista, which is the hottest place in North America.

By the time we reached town it was dark, but we could hear the clanking of wheels behind us, the growling of male voices, and we knew the circus was with us.

"I ain't going to like this circus, and nobody can make me," Omar remarked as we stood beside the trunks. "We'd better start on."

"Leave it to Harmony," I sug-

gested. "He and Tufts seem to be cooking something up."

THAT night Harmony said nothing, but on the following morning, while the hands were gloomily going about their preparations for the day's exhibition, our official guide, philosopher and friend came over to where we were by the cook tent.

"How would we like to go into this business?" he asked.

"Not me," said Omar. "You can carry those telegraph poles around on your back, if you like, but not me."

"It does look like hard work," I admitted.

"I don't mean that at all," Harmony continued. "I mean, how would you like to run this circus and help me manage it?"

"Great!" retorted Omar. "I would also, admit to own the National City Bank."

"We can have this circus if we will take it," Harmony went on. "I've been talking things over with Tufts, and he recalls that eight hundred distinctly. If we say the word this circus is ours, lock, stock and barrel."

"You mean he wants to give us his circus?" Omar asked. "If he does, there's something the matter with it."

"There is," agreed our boss. "It's on the verge of ruin. Nobody has been paid for weeks. They're just beating the sheriff over each county line. The hands are going to quit. But it's worth \$800."

"Sometimes," Omar remarked, "your business sense is fine, and other times it gets like it is now."

"It's this way," Harmony said, addressing himself to me. "At the present time this outfit is able to take in enough cash to buy food, and no more. The immediate bookings are in dry, sparse country, with no population, and Tufts is at the end of his rope. If he goes on he goes bust. If he turns the show over to us we may, by a miracle, pull it through. If we can reach King City everything will be lovely. After King City we ought to make plenty of money. Shall we take over Tufts Mammoth Circus?"

"Fair enough," I answered. "It's up to you, Harmony. I'll do what I can."

"So will I, for that matter," Omar put in.

THUS we crashed into the circus business at Linda Vista, and that same night, after turning over the show to H. Childs, Mr. Bernal Tufts got himself enjoyably intoxicated and started for Seattle, where he claimed to have a home.

"If you boys come through all right lemme know," he said in farewell. "Maybe you can get along with them hangnails. If you make any money you're welcome to it."

After supper that evening Harmony walked into the cook tent, interrupted the hum of vanishing soup, stood on a box of canned apples and made the hands a speech.

Harmony is a natural pleader, and if he had been born a lawyer no railroad would ever win its case against a poor widow woman.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, when the eaters looked up, "Bernal P. Tufts no longer owns or operates this circus. I am the new boss. If you stick to me till we reach King City I will pay off in full, together with a nice bonus in cash for one and all."

That is a brief condensation of what he said, but he used up ten minutes in adorning the simple statement with the flowers of rhetoric he knows so well. At the end of the speech Mr. Childs stepped down, and those sad, simple and unpaid circus performers rose up and gave him a small cheer. They agreed to trust in Harmony and his two friends, and collect all back pay when the outfit reached King City, which is a county seat, a great oil center and the hub of a populous and prosperous farming community. There was money in King City, and the performers knew it.

Under the new management a number of changes occurred the moment B. P. Tufts faded from view. They consisted of improvements dictated by the new manager and agreed to by every one, except Omar. When he heard what Harmony laid out for him to do he roared like a wounded moose.

"Certainly I can box," he told Harmony, "but I won't. I knew you'd drag me into this fool thing somehow."

"You'll box all right," Harmony smiled. "You'll box or you won't eat."

IN ORDER to insure greater honesty at the door and acquire whatever half dollar started our way the regular ticket seller was removed to the horse department and I was installed to handle the cash.

Mr. Gill was required to put on a pair of underdrawers and box three brisk rounds. The gentleman with whom he was to do his boxing was none other than Dorlando Hergesheimer, the tiger tamer. At this point it seems essential to reach back into the details and look over certain features of the organization bequeathed us by the departed Tufts.

When we took it under a friendly wing, that circus contained just one wild animal, if you don't count Henri, the cook, who was always more or less volcanic by nature. This wild animal was a Bengal tiger, referred to as Nero, and while I never knew much about tigers as a class, and have, in fact, avoided them, I could still see that there was reason for the dread in which Nero was held by the circus employees.

The wild animal had only one friend in the world, and that was Dorlando Hergesheimer, the dauntless and unshaven trainer. On the advertising he was billed as Dorlando the Fearless, and he was all of that, because Nero was no joke tiger. He had a full equipment of saw teeth and a rotten disposition and he never lost either for a minute.

Nero was a lean and hungry-looking beast, with concave flanks and a couple of hips that looked as if somebody had broken them and set them back wrong. On his upper jaw were a pair of fangs labeled sudden death, and when he snarled you could see clear down his red and inflamed throat as far as his third speed forward. He could bite a man's leg off with one chew, and would, if given the slightest encouragement.

If you passed his cage in a careless manner he had a playful habit of reaching for you with his left paw, and during the first week Omar went by, looking innocently for a tin pail, and Nero slapped him one and removed a \$12 suit of clothes without touching a button. Omar bled a little and declared war on Nero, and that war continued from then on.

Every time our little third ingredient sauntered by the tiger wagon he either hit Nero with a small three-cornered rock or pounded on the end of his tail with a broom handle. Neither of these attentions brought the two of them closer to a warm friendship. On the end of Nero's tail was a knobby, bushy growth, and this hairy apex was extraordinarily tender. When Omar learned this anatomical fact he got him an iron bar and played for the tail consistently.

As Nero was the only real, live wild animal in the Tufts Mammoth Circus, naturally he was necessary to its continued existence. Likewise and hence, Dorlando Hergesheimer, the fearless and joyless tamer of jungle beasts, was essential to our success. Harmony perceived this at once, and did everything he could to make Dorlando's life a happy one. But not Omar.

IN ADDITION, there was Jimmy Ricks, a left-handed tight-rope walker and comedian, and, besides him, Joe Lavelle, a rheumatic clown, who began clowning the year General Grant entered high school. Paddy Sheehan and Ella Lohman were our trapeze performers, and there was nothing the matter with them.

May Cruze was the lady bareback rider and weighed ninety-three pounds in her war paint. The trick cyclist was Henry Peace. Jimmy Jinsen's Educated Seals rounded out the list of artistes, and brings us down to the band, which was composed of four ruddy beer drinkers, related to the German nation by marriage. They played a snare drum, a fife, a cornet of the E-flat type, and a trombone, and you could hear that band thirty-two miles on a cloudless night. They didn't mind the lack of the weekly envelope, but they did complain in their quaint, gargling tongue over the hideous scarcity of beer saloons.

Then we had a small corps of bill-



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posters, tent and wagon men, cooks and ticket sellers.

Everybody had to be fed during the period of poor cities, but all agreed to hang on until we reached King City, where we would have to make good or follow B. P. Tufts in his disappearance specialty.

As I said, Harmony arranged the boxing exhibition between Omar Gill and Dorlando Hergesheimer because of what he considered the general paucity of genteel entertainment and the difficulty of dragging the performance over a couple of hours with the materials Mr. Tufts left us.

DORLANDO agreed readily enough to box with Omar before the simple country folk who might attend our show, but he put in a proviso of his own. He made it plain that he would have to thrash Omar at each and every show. He desired to emerge a victor, as became one who tamed tigers. Would it seem fitting for a tiger tamer to be defeated by a little fat man who looked a good deal like a perambulating casaba melon? Not at all.

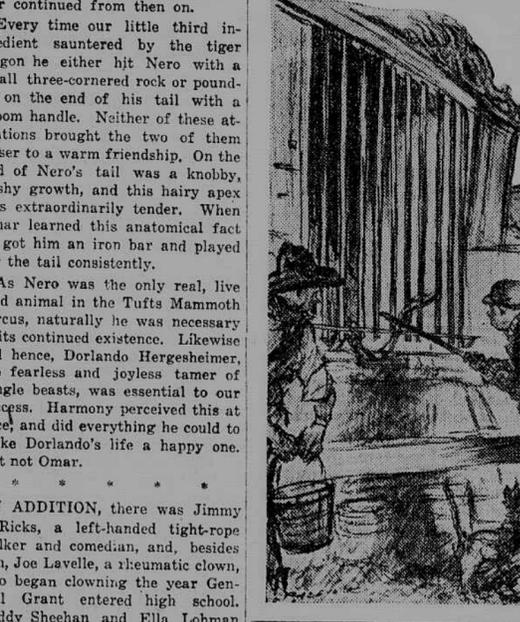
"All right," said Harmony in reply. "All right, Dorlando. I'll fix it so you win."

Then he told Omar what would be required of him, and if you were standing on the west coast of Denmark you could have heard Omar's shrieks of rage. Many years before, when Mr. Gill was a lad in Oakland, he had been an amateur boxer, who had won medals and such and who took pride in his ability to put up his dukes. Now he was called upon to let a tiger-taming

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"I didn't want to join this circus, anyhow," he protested. "If anything happens; don't blame me."

Day by day Omar renewed his complaints to Harmony about the



ON THE end of Nero's tail was a hairy apex—extraordinarily tender

the other side, walking gently and prepared to jump.

Ferocious as he was, Dorlando could walk into the cage and slap him with his bare hand, whereupon all would be peace, and the roars of rage would simmer down to gentle purrs.

Then I caught Omar playing xylophone on the end of Nero's tail.

"What for?" I demanded in astonishment.

"Because," he retorted irritably, "if I can get him mad enough he may take a crack at Dorlando. Then we'll have to shoot him, and thus two of my favorite pests will be removed."

I took the stick away from him

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disgrace of permitting a flabby ex-bartender to wipe him up. He stated that his pride was hurt and that Dorlando's boasting made him sick. Finally the boss wrote to King City and communicated with a lad named Duffy Loomis, a second-rate boxer, whom he had known in San Francisco. The result of this was that Loomis agreed to box with the circus from King City on, and Omar was to be relieved.

"That's fixed," Harmony said. "You'll have to go on boxing till we reach King City, but Loomis will be waiting there."

"It's about time," Omar replied. "I couldn't stand much more of this. I'm willing to help you, Harmony, but there are limits."

REGARDING this Nero tiger, trained and handled by Dorlando, there existed a mighty peculiar and interesting situation. Dorlando and his large cat understood each other perfectly and had about the same mental equipment, though Nero could roar the louder of the two. Dorlando was not a sweet and gentle soul, with the mind of a poet; he was a flabby, broad-mouthed roughneck and altogether sullen and insulting in his dealings with fellow men. Yet Nero was unquestionably fond of him to the point of feline adoration. There was a mighty bond of affection between jungle beast and the former bartender from the Barbary Coast. Probably that explains why Dorlando could take such liberties with the big brute. But nobody else did. Those working for Tufts Mammoth Circus passed on

when we arrived in King City, and luck seemed to be with us for once. It was a fine, brisk day, and, as the show had well heralded, the rural population began drifting into town early in the day. The rusty automobiles kept on coming until noon, when there must have been between three and four thousand anxious visitors, all buying soda pop and peanuts and waiting patiently for the Tufts Mammoth Circus to warm up and entertain them.

We had in plain sight at least two thousand dollars for the afternoon show, and perhaps a similar amount for the evening, which would stand us on our financial feet, pay off the help and start us bounding toward prosperity and fame.

Harmony was jubilant over the outlook until a few minutes after noon. Word came that the wagons containing the circus seats had broken down on the road, twelve miles north of King City. The rest of the organization arrived on time, but there was no going ahead with the afternoon performance without those seats.

When Harmony heard of the disaster he swore mildly and found a way out. The afternoon show was billed to begin at 3 o'clock, and the crowd acted as though its appetite for circuses was keen. Therefore, if those seats didn't get in we would lose the patronage of some four thousand eager souls at 50 cents a soul.

Hastily he set about the preparations. We couldn't give the conventional circus parade, because we lacked material. We didn't have enough parading matter to take four seconds passing a given point.

"All right," Harmony said briskly. "We'll string the wagons around the town square. We'll have a grand concert by the band, after which I will make them a little speech, telling them of the ocular joys to come. We will then have a free boxing exhibition between Dorlando and Omar."

"Not Omar," said that individual, speaking up sharply. "Not at all. You said Duffy Loomis would box the tiger feeder."

"I know," Harmony replied impatiently. "But Loomis can't box until the regular show. He's late, too. He's over in Salinas getting a pair of green trunks, and when I see him I'll give him a good lacing. However, this is the last time, Omar. You won't mind boxing Dorlando just this one more time to hold the crowd. Think how much depends on it."

"Well," said the little fellow, "if I must, I must. But remember, Harmony, there's a limit."

Harmony then passed on to other matters, and Omar went away to put on his boxing pants with the blue ribbons.

IT WAS a highly successful and diverting show in the open air, without the charge of eye a thin dime. We pulled the battered but mysterious wagons into a hollow square, and in the center we erected the portable ring. The band climbed aboard and

produced melodies which seemed to cheer the crowd. These tired ranchers had surged into town to be amused and they looked it.

Harmony mounted the rostrum and said his little speech, while the sad-eyed farmers applauded him. He wound up by calling attention to the three-round match which would be offered at once.

"This is not an ordinary boxing match, ladies and gentlemen," he explained. "You will see here real science and real fighting between two finished opponents. Permit me to present Dorlando, former lightweight champion of Montana."

Mr. Hergesheimer climbed into the ring, extended his chest and bowed.

"And Kid Swift," said Harmony, at which moment Omar came in silently from the opposite side, "amateur champion of the Pacific Coast."

Omar nodded modestly. Harmony dropped out of the ring and rang the starting gong. The crowd took a long, delighted breath, and the boxers circled for the preliminary blows. For the time being every one forgot the string of circus wagons and even the open cage containing Nero the Ferocious, which was roped off so that the jungle king couldn't sideswipe the uncautious.

However, Nero was there, prowling up and down his cell and apparently very moody and morose. Every so often he let go a blood-curdling howl, and while these were heard and noticed at first, they were subsequently drowned out by the roars of the German band and then by the wild and enthusiastic shouts of the four thousand ranchers watching the battle.

"Harmony," I said huskily, "this was a good idea of yours."

"Great," he shouted back.

Then he changed his mind. Four seconds after Omar and the tamer of Nero had entered that public arena to do battle I observed certain shocking changes in the old and formal schedule. During those two dry and dismal weeks coming down the San Dimas Valley we had all become accustomed to a regular fistie routine.

In those previous bouts Omar and Dorlando had fluttered about each other in a harmless way, and every so often Dorlando took a wallop at Omar. Our boxer had softened his punches, according to orders, and had permitted Dorlando to win his fight, generally being knocked down in the final round and crawling sally out of the ring, amid the plaudits of the crowd, while Dorlando stuck out his bosom and bowed with his hand on his stomach.

IN THIS, his final battle, and before a large, cheering public, Omar had altered the program without consulting any one. He gazed out over the four thousand spectators, and apparently came to the conclusion that here was a nice time to show a crowd of fellow men how good a fighter he was and just how Dorlando really stood as compared with him.

Following out this secret thought, when the bell rang Omar walked over to Mr. Hergesheimer, who prepared to dance a bit before striking Omar. Omar swung his left fist in a sweeping circle, and, as Dorlando dodged, Omar curled his arm into the shape of a pretzel and sunk his right fist so deep into Dorlando's tender stomach that it looked like a man reaching for something in a churn.

At that instant Dorlando saw five hundred flying fists, and they all hit him on the nose. Omar knocked him down with one hard punch and hit him twice as he fell. The tiger tamer grunted, turned to a green and sickly hue, and hit the end of a post with his spine. He gasped and then inquired:

"What does that mean?"

"That was the father of this," Omar said calmly, and then he landed his left fist against Mr. Hergesheimer's ear, knocking that useful organ loose from its moorings. "Here are some more relations," he added, following across the ring and swinging with great joy.

Dorlando arose to his feet, went completely mad, gave a hoarse cry and tried to kill Omar Gill with his hands. Omar backed off and planted two hard blows, one on either tigers-taming eye.

"Wait a minute!" Harmony howled from the ground.

"Sure," said Omar. "I'm going to wait till he gets up and then I'm going to bump him again."

I stood there yelling time and other peaceful words. Harmony clattered the gong, indicating that the first round was over and to cease firing; but it now appeared that this fight was going to get along without rounds or anything else except murder, mayhem, and broken bones. Mr. Gill was using the experience of his San Francisco years, and Mr. Hergesheimer was suffering untold miseries.

The crowd, expecting a dainty little puff-ball exhibition, with feather punches, now perceived that they were witnessing a battle. In what should have been the second round of Dorlando's Waterloo, when Har-

mony tried to climb into the ring strong hands held him back. These gentle farmers actually liked it. Their yells of joy could be heard afar, echoing in the distant foothills, and that is why nobody had time to give a thought to Nero, the jungle king.

FOR two weeks Nero had been witnessing these daily combats in the circus tent, and had always seen his beloved master in the act of knocking Omar both hither and yon. Nero now saw that something was wrong. His master was apparently being murdered by this small man who had so misused his tail, and the first any one knew there was a loud noise coming from the tiger wagon. When I looked Nero was taking a series of short runs and hurling himself against the bars.

In the next few seconds those four thousand natives of the soil spent their time exclusively in going somewhere else. King City looked like a colony of red ants into which some unkind person had poured kerosene. I have never seen an assemblage unassemble itself with such dexterity and speed. You couldn't see anything but fleeing farmers, running ranchers and hurrying husbandmen, and the slowest one of them was making twelve miles an hour against a strong wind.

They got away from that town as a bunch of birdshot leaves a twelve-gauge gun, and the dust of motorcycles, automobiles and hoofs rose and covered the town like a pall.

First to flee were the employees of B. P. Tufts, because they knew Nero. I grabbed Harmony by the arm and he grasped Omar by the leg and pulled him from the ring. It was lucky he did, because after tearing around in a demented circle Nero leaped into the air and landed upon the platform, which a moment before had been the scene of fistie carnival.

In five minutes the only living thing in King City was the canary in the railroad ticket office. Dorlando lifted himself slowly on a weak elbow and felt of himself. There was blood on his nose, and when I gave a last, hasty glance Nero was standing over the figure of his fallen master and was licking his battered countenance with a red and furrowed tongue. Dorlando sat up with an effort. He rose to his feet, pushing Nero petulantly aside; and at that moment Harmony found us an automobile which nobody seemed to be using.

WITH Omar still wearing his white underdrawers and Harmony in his ringmaster costume, we joined the leaving parade, while a stranger howled at us to give him a ride in his own auto. Dorlando saw us going, and about ten minutes later Harmony glanced behind us at a cloud of dust that seemed to be following.

"You better step on that," he said. "Dorlando is coming, and he's got his gang with him."

We crossed that large, bleak desert at a speed which gives us the desert crossing record for that year. Looking back now and then, we could see something that resembled a runaway sunset. The red in it was Dorlando's fighting shirt, and the yellow was Nero, who was sitting on the back seat, flecked with foam and eager for human flesh.

Toward night we turned off the desert, climbed a few friendly foothills and finally struck into a wagon road that led on and up until we came to a lone ranch house. The rancher's wife was lighting the evening lamp, and I thought I detected the faint smell of frying bacon.

"Let's get out and go in," Omar said uneasily. "I ain't any too darn warm in these pants."

Harmony glared. "Nobody cares about you," he said lifelessly. "You just try to keep still and not remind me."

The farmer came down to the gate and Harmony advanced on foot to explain that three unfortunate circus persons were in urgent need of food and lodging for the night. The man listened, and when he began to laugh I knew we were saved. He opened up, and I drove in.

"Glad to know you," Omar said. "Have you got an old blanket, or anything?"

The rancher grinned and said he could probably find one.

"All right," said Omar, "only don't let go of that gun, and don't leave this gate unbarred to-night."

"Why?" asked the man.

"Because pretty soon you're liable to see a queer-looking man drive up here with a tiger on the back seat of his automobile. They're both crazy, so whatever you do don't let them in."

"A wild tiger?" queried our host.

"Sure," said Omar, "and the man is wilder than the tiger. Let's get that blanket and go inside."

"And," mourned Harmony as we walked up to the house, "there goes my eight hundred and there goes my circus."

"Well," Omar concluded, "I told you not to drag me into the circus business, but you would have your way."

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money tried to climb into the ring strong hands held him back. These gentle farmers actually liked it. Their yells of joy could be heard afar, echoing in the distant foothills, and that is why nobody had time to give a thought to Nero, the jungle king.

FOR two weeks Nero had been witnessing these daily combats in the circus tent, and had always seen his beloved master in the act of knocking Omar both hither and yon. Nero now saw that something was wrong. His master was apparently being murdered by this small man who had so misused his tail, and the first any one knew there was a loud noise coming from the tiger wagon. When I looked Nero was taking a series of short runs and hurling himself against the bars.

In the next few seconds those four thousand natives of the soil spent their time exclusively in going somewhere else. King City looked like a colony of red ants into which some unkind person had poured kerosene. I have never seen an assemblage unassemble itself with such dexterity and speed. You couldn't see anything but fleeing farmers, running ranchers and hurrying husbandmen, and the slowest one of them was making twelve miles an hour against a strong wind.

They got away from that town as a bunch of birdshot leaves a twelve-gauge gun, and the dust of motorcycles, automobiles and hoofs rose and covered the town like a pall.

First to flee were the employees of B. P. Tufts, because they knew Nero. I grabbed Harmony by the arm and he grasped Omar by the leg and pulled him from the ring. It was lucky he did, because after tearing around in a demented circle Nero leaped into the air and landed upon the platform, which a moment before had been the scene of fistie carnival.

In five minutes the only living thing in King City was the canary in the railroad ticket office. Dorlando lifted himself slowly on a weak elbow and felt of himself. There was blood on his nose, and when I gave a last, hasty glance Nero was standing over the figure of his fallen master and was licking his battered countenance with a red and furrowed tongue. Dorlando sat up with an effort. He rose to his feet, pushing Nero petulantly aside; and at that moment Harmony found us an automobile which nobody seemed to be using.

WITH Omar still wearing his white underdrawers and Harmony in his ringmaster costume, we joined the leaving parade, while a stranger howled at us to give him a ride in his own auto. Dorlando saw us going, and about ten minutes later Harmony glanced behind us at a cloud of dust that seemed to be following.

"You better step on that," he said. "Dorlando is coming, and he's got his gang with him."

We crossed that large, bleak desert at a speed which gives us the desert crossing record for that year. Looking back now and then, we could see something that resembled a runaway sunset. The red in it was Dorlando's fighting shirt, and the yellow was Nero, who was sitting on the back seat, flecked with foam and eager for human flesh.

Toward night we turned off the desert, climbed a few friendly foothills and finally struck into a wagon road that led on and up until we came to a lone ranch house. The rancher's wife was lighting the evening lamp, and I thought I detected the faint smell of frying bacon.

"Let's get out and go in," Omar said uneasily. "I ain't any too darn warm in these pants."

Harmony glared. "Nobody cares about you," he said lifelessly. "You just try to keep still and not remind me."

The farmer came down to the gate and Harmony advanced on foot to explain that three unfortunate circus persons were in urgent need of food and lodging for the night. The man listened, and when he began to laugh I knew we were saved. He opened up, and I drove in.

"Glad to know you," Omar said. "Have you got an old blanket, or anything?"

The rancher grinned and said he could probably find one.

"All right," said Omar, "only don't let go of that gun, and don't leave this gate unbarred to-night."

"Why?" asked the man.

"Because pretty soon you're liable to see a queer-looking man drive up here with a tiger on the back seat of his automobile. They're both crazy, so whatever you do don't let them in."

"A wild tiger?" queried our host.

"Sure," said Omar, "and the man is wilder than the tiger. Let's get that blanket and go inside."

"And," mourned Harmony as we walked up to the house, "there goes my eight hundred and there goes my circus."

"Well," Omar concluded, "I told you not to drag me into the circus business, but you would have your way."