LIONS IN THE BARN

The Great Death-Defying
SIGNORE JOSEPH DOBBINELLI

Most Daring Animal Trainer in the World, the sign reads, and Sr. Dobbinelli is in need of a good, stout winter barn for his circus animals. Clay and his family have just the barn in Connecticut, but do they have what it takes to care for lions and tigers?

In this delightful tale of adventure and family life on the farm, Clay is in for some lessons on responsibility and wild animal training.
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CHAPTER 1
Thanks to the Elephant Man

“Say, Pa,” Clay called out to the chair where his father was getting shaved by the village barber, “this says there’s a circus feller looking for a barn.”

“What says?” Mr. Baldwin sang back.

“This here New York paper,” said Clay, holding up the week-old newspaper. “Says he’s looking for a good stout barn for wintering his lions and tigers.”

“Guess this be too far out in Connecticut to suit him, Son.”

The barber lifted away his razor and said, “Could be, Hank, he’ll come out this far. It ain’t so easy to find warm barns standing empty for the winter.”

Most circuses in the old days had no permanent winter headquarters. This gave many a farmer in New York state and western Connecticut a chance to make a little extra cash by winter-boarding animals.
But this was the first time there had been any notion of having circus animals in the neighborhood of High Ridge Farm. The Baldwins had an old barn that had once been used for sheep and so was well-built and warm. It was now standing empty because the flock had grown too large for it and had been moved to larger quarters.

“Let’s see that paper, Clay,” said Mr. Baldwin as he stepped out of the chair and put on his hat. He glanced at the date before reading the advertisement. “Last week’s paper, hmm. We may be too late, but it won’t do no harm to try and write him, I guess.”

He took a small notebook out of his pocket and copied down the name and address.

“J. Dobbinelli,” he said, spelling it out.

Until then, the circus man’s name had meant almost nothing to Clay, but now that he heard it spelled aloud, he felt he had heard or seen it somewhere before. Could it be on that old billboard down by the blacksmith’s?
CHAPTER 6

Fresh Paint

Clay had never known a winter to pass as quickly as this one. It seemed only yesterday that he had been chopping away, building up the woodpile for the cold months ahead. Now the pile was dwindling, maple sugaring time had come and gone, and March thaws were melting the snowdrifts.

Brown patches of earth began to appear in the sunny, sheltered places in the yard and in the fields. And the next thing Clay knew, Emily was bringing home bunches of silvery pussy-willows from the bush down in the corner of the meadow.

Clay dreaded to see all these signs of spring, because it meant that the time was drawing near when Hathaway’s Rolling Show would start off on its summer tour, taking Signor Joseph Dobbinelli and his lions, tiger, and leopard cats with it.

There could be no traveling for heavy wagons
with Chaka for company.

Chaka roared again when he saw his playmate leaving him. He dropped to all fours and padded over to sniff at the cage door impatiently. The carelessly closed catch fell free. The door came ajar. Chaka quickly pushed it open with his head and squeezed the rest of himself through before it could close again. He went straight to the open outside door where he had seen Clay disappear.

In the doorway he paused a little uncertainly to look around. He had been shut inside this dim old barn ever since the day of his arrival here, months before. The outside world looked strange to him, but inviting. He sniffed the air with its many inviting smells.

Voices and laughter sounded somewhere in the distance. Chaka bounded out into the sunshine and ran lightheartedly toward the voices.

Up at the house, Clay was starting back to the barn with the hoop in his hand. He reached the lane just in time to see Chaka lope out of sight toward the front yard. Clay was so surprised that,
for a brief moment, he just stood still, staring.

“Oh, no!” he thought aloud. “Emily and her friends!”

He leaped the stone wall bordering the lane and ran as hard as he could for the front yard.

What would he do when he got there? Grab Chaka by the tail, he thought frantically, or what?

Meanwhile, Emily and her guests were playing beanbag. The girl who had just caught the chunky calico-covered bag paused with it in her hand. “Is that your dog, Emily? What a funny tail he’s got.”

Emily turned to look. Her lips popped open in an O of alarm. Her body froze still. “That’s not a dog, Katie.” Her voice sounded tight and sort of squeaky. “It’s—it’s one of the circus lions.”

Katie dropped the beanbag.

Chaka pounced on the bag as though it were his ball. He tossed it into the air and caught it in his teeth when it came down. He pranced and tossed it up again. This time when it came down, the beans spilled out of a torn place, and some of them slid