

Wicked Jerry's Amazing Circus had a high reputation, despite its peculiar name. But anyone could get something to ease their minds in these difficult times, from wonderful acrobatics, skilled but somewhat terrifying clowns, to unreal personas like a bearded woman. Every time they were in town, tickets were sold on a whim, while some of the so-called scalpers were getting rich from reselling to poor, naïve souls.

Hazelnut, a young golden retriever, was too clever for these tricks and would never buy a ticket for such a price. That and he could barely afford the regular one. The circus was that popular, even more so than winter holidays. But he had to get inside, somehow.

He wandered around the area near the main tent, wondering if there was another way to sneak in, while ignoring suspicious gazes of workers and artists. The ticket booth was long closed and you could only get some peanuts and overpriced popcorn, but for what reason?

Judging by laughter and cheering, people inside the tent had the best time of their lives, while light-brown canines could only listen and sigh in envy. Then suddenly, a tubular voice could be heard, silencing all the clapping and children's joyful screams.

- Thank you, folks for this great time so far. Let's take a breather and come back in the next thirty minutes. Refreshments are still available for purchase, so don't be shy!

That could be his chance! When the crowd left the tent to once more lose their money for food which could be bought in the supermarket for way less, Hazelnut did the oldest trick in the book. Pretending that he's leaving as well, he walked backwards inside the massive pavilion, using the horse of running children and annoyed mothers as a brilliant cover up.

Once there, he tried to hide himself under one bench, hoping he wasn't spotted just yet. After all, who would watch every single person leaving the show?

- What are you doing there, buddy?

Drats! Hazelnut came out of the hiding, while some of the hay mixed with grass stayed on his clothing. After standing up, before his eyes, was the most cartoonish looking ring leader he could ever imagine. Barely reaching his waist even with his top hat, the hamster guy stood there on his little legs, while his massive belly could resemble a soccer ball. Only his stomach was gigantic, compared to rest of his peculiar figure.

- Sneaking in, huh? Could you show me your ticket, buddy? You can't fool this old guy, that was just an awful piece of trickery. You can do better than that.

The "big" boss put a cigar in his mouth, without lighting it. Probably just for the show or trying to further intimidate the poor canine. He surely saw enough con artists in his life, especially after hiring the best ones for his thriving business.

- I... I don't have one. I... lost it?

- Why are you asking me? You're the one who tries to scam me. But you know what? I understand... - he put a genuine smile on his face. That or he was an amazing actor - I know it's hard to get tickets, especially from these thieving scalpers. Why not use a VIP sitting right over there?

The hamster pointed at a tiny stool at the other end of the tent, extremely close to the ring. But Hazelnut wasn't suspicious at all, despite all the red flags about this situation.

- Really? Just for me? - his eyes lighten up with hope.

Ring leader patted his back, before leaving, while Hazelnut took his chance and sat on that wooden stool. Maybe it wasn't the best seat, but at least it was much closer to all the artists. What could go wrong?

Twenty minutes later, all people went back, some empty-handed, since the circus was more important than absurdly priced nourishment. They were eyeing Hazelnut, wondering what he was doing over there, but most just straight up ignored him.

The music started, while a colorfully painted cannon entered the ring, pulled by a massive, muscular lioness. Despite her gender, her head was adorned with an impressive mane. Was that the mentioned bearded woman? Others were setting up the wooden containers, far away from the mortar, before leaving as well. The ring leader used his megaphone, announcing an additional part of the show.

- Thank you for coming back, folks! Now, without further ado, let's applaud our volunteer, Tippy the Great! - the hamster yelled, while the reflector's lights pointed at Hazelnut, so everyone could see him. He didn't even bother with learning his name.

- Now, Tippy will enter this very cannon, where he will be shot out of just into this tiny barrel of delicious pudding. Don't worry folks, we're professionals!

Hazelnut tried to stand up and make his escape, but the lioness was quicker, placing her massive hand on the canine's shoulder, making him follow to his fate. She placed a helmet on his head and made him enter the cannon, now aiming towards the small target.

- Is everything in place? Yes? Good. Let the show begin!

With a sinister smile on his miniature face, the ringleader himself lit the fuse, while the gigantic crowd waited in anticipation. Hazelnut could only pray, hating himself for his greed and stupidity.

A loud bang filled the tent, when a light brown blur flew in sounds of clapping and cheering. The canine already said his goodbyes to his short-lived existence, before suddenly he successfully landed inside the barrel, eradicating it.

Hearing laughter, he tried to stand up in confusion, while something light dropped on his body, covering him even more. The white feathers mixed with sticky sweets made him look quite a fool already.

The music changed to more cheerful, with mixed clucking sounds to it. Can it get any worse? This line of questioning always proved that indeed it can get more unpleasant.

While wobbling around and barely seeing the entrance, Hazelnut tries his best to leave, but it isn't over yet. Sounds of high-pitched horns startled him, making the poor canine run even faster. Apparently, ridiculously dressed clowns inside a tiny car and on child bicycles chased after him, throwing pies one after the other, making him a delicious target for ridicule. The laughter rang in his ears, barely escaping the punishment.

He couldn't see well with all the feathers, pudding and pie filling on his face, eventually tripping into a tub of water currently used by feral elephants. The annoyed creatures spit water on him, stomping their giant feet.

Hazelnut finally learned something extremely important. It always can get worse.