

CLOWNING AROUND

HAL AMES



Jerry loved the circus. He was always excited when the circus came to town. It was not a big circus, but it was always fun to see the animals, actors, and most of all, the clowns.

He lived in a small town. Most of the people who lived there had been there for all their lives. Most of the families lived on farms or had shops selling supplies.

Jerry's parents owned the small general store located in the center of the town. Everyone went there to buy things they needed from tools, to clothes, to seed. Jerry knew all the people and they knew him.

On the weekends, and during the summer, Jerry worked in the store helping his parents. He saved his money he made there to go to the circus and to do all the fun things there.

Summers were the best time of the year, and this summer was not going to be any different. There was no school, so he could run and play with his friends. Usually they would pretend to be in the circus. His friends and he would become lion tamers, horseback riders, tightrope walkers, trapeze artists, and clowns. Jerry liked it best when they played clowns.

He would go to the drugstore and buy makeup to paint his face. His parents' general store had the things he needed to make wigs, costumes, and big shoes. His mother helped him make his costumes, and then he would be the best clown of all.

He thought the library would be a good place to look up information on how to be a clown, but he found out there was not as much information there as he thought.

However, on the internet he found many articles about clowns. He found one called, “The History of Clowns in America”. Soon he began to dream about traveling with the circus and being the best clown ever!

One morning, as Jerry was on his way to work at the store, he saw a sign on one of the lampposts. The sign said the circus would be coming in two weeks. There were pictures of animals, pretty ladies, clowns, and behind them, a picture of a large white tent.

Jerry jumped in the air in excitement.

At the bottom of the sign, there was a special message: *‘Apply at the general store to be in the circus. Many positions are open’*.

Excited to find out what the sign meant, Jerry ran to his parents’ store and only stopped when he got to his father who was cleaning the floor.

“Is it true?!” Jerry exclaimed.

“Is what true?” his father asked.

Out of breath, Jerry asked, “Is it true... that the circus... is looking... for people.... to help?”

“Yes, it is. The owner of the circus was in here earlier today and left some papers with me. Anyone interested can fill out one of these applications and then I will give it to the owner when he returns next week. He’ll talk to the people about working for him right away,” his father explained.

“Can I fill one out?” Jerry begged.

His father gave him one of the forms. Jerry took it to the back room of the store and set it on a table. He looked for a pencil, but could not find one.

Jerry yelled into the store, “Mom, do you know where I can find a pencil?”

“Look in my sewing box. There should be one there. Remember to put it back when you’re finished. OK?” Jerry’s mom answered him.

Jerry found the pencil and filled in all the spaces to answer the questions.

When he was done, he put the pencil back into the sewing box and then took the paper to his father.

“I finished it. I hope they have a place for me. I hope I can be a clown!” Jerry said with excitement in his voice.

Jerry ran out of the store and across the street to the café where his friend Christopher’s mother worked.

As he ran into the café, he almost ran into one of the waitresses.

“I’m sorry,” Jerry apologized. “Do you know where Christopher is?”

“I think he’s in the kitchen. He’s doing the dishes,” she replied.

“What did he do this time?” Jerry asked.

The waitress answered while giggling, “I’m not sure, but I think he’ll be washing dishes for a long time.”

Jerry knew Christopher would not be able to talk to him, but he went back to the kitchen anyway.

“Christopher! When you’re done, can you come over to the store? I have something to tell you,” Jerry yelled over to Christopher.

Just then, he saw Christopher’s mother looking at him. He knew he had better leave or he would be in trouble with her as well. He left quickly and returned to the store.

It was hard for him to do his work. He was sure the owner of the circus would hire him to be a clown. He could hardly wait for the owner to come and tell him if he would be hired or not.

The next day Christopher came to Jerry’s room.

“Hi, Jerry,” Christopher greeted him as he walked into the room.

“Oh, hi Christopher. I have something to show you. The circus is coming to town and I applied to work with them,” Jerry told Christopher while showing him a copy of the poster he took from the store.

“You know that’s hard work, don’t you?” Christopher asked him. “My dad helped with the circus last year when they came to town, and he got so tired, he decided not to

do it again this year.”

They talked for a while and then Christopher went home.

When he was not working, Jerry practiced his tricks. He had learned how to juggle three balls. He was trying to learn tricks he had seen in the books from the library, but they were very difficult. He had taken some gymnastics classes when he was younger, so he knew how to do a cartwheel and a summersault.

The week passed slowly for Jerry, but he was still excited.

Working in the store was not a lot of fun. He had to clean the floors, arrange the merchandise on the shelves, carry bags out to the customer’s cars, and do just about anything else his father or mother asked him to do. He did not like the work, but he did like the money they paid him.

“Jerry, will you watch the front counter for me?” his father asked Jerry, as he went to the back to get some supplies for the front counter.

“Sure, dad,” Jerry responded.

He went behind the counter and climbed up onto the stool that sat in front of the cash register. He knew how to count money and he helped by selling things.

While he was sitting, daydreaming, a stranger came in the door. The bell on the top of the door rang, which got Jerry’s attention.

Jerry sat up.

“Hello, how may I help you today?” Jerry quickly greeted the new customer the way his parents had taught him.

“Well, hello young man. Is your father here?” he asked with a smile on his face.

He was a big man with white hair and a short white beard. He looked very friendly. He had a big strong voice. It was easy to hear what he said.

“Sure, let me go get him,” Jerry responded.

Just as Jerry was going to get his father, he walked out of the back room and walked toward the sales counter.

“Ah, Mr. Roberts, it’s good to see you again,” Jerry’s dad greeted the man.

His dad introduced Jerry to the man, “Jerry, this is the owner of the circus, Mr. Roberts.”

“You’re just the person I was waiting to see!” Jerry blurted out.

“Really, why’s that?” he responded.

“I want to join your circus. I filled out the paperwork and I’m ready to be the best clown you have ever seen!” Jerry said confidently.

“Oh really? I’m glad to hear that. Actually, I have enough clowns right now. What I really need is people to help set up the tents and other equipment. Do you think you could do that?” the owner of the circus asked.

“When do you want me to start?” Jerry asked.

“We’ll be here on Friday. We’ll have the parade in the morning and then in the afternoon we’ll set up the tents. We need to be ready for the big shows on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. It’s very hard work,” the owner warned Jerry.

With a sad look on his face, Jerry answered, “I guess I can do that, but I really want to be a clown.”

The owner looked at Jerry and thought for a moment.

“Young man, if you do a good job helping with the tents, I’ll give you a try at being a clown. How’s that?” the owner said with a big smile.

“REALLY! That would be great! I’ll be the best worker you have ever had and then I’ll be the best clown as well!” Jerry said, as he jumped off the stool to tell his mother.

Jerry’s dad and the circus owner talked for a while. The circus owner took the other applications and left.

Friday came and Jerry and his friends were ready for the parade. This was one of the best parts of the circus. All the performers and animals came through the middle of the town and then went out to the large field by the school. It was the same every year, but it was still fun to watch, especially since Jerry was going to help set up the tents.

Everyone cheered and clapped as the parade went through the town on Main Street

toward the school. The last wagon had the tigers and on top was the owner of the circus. He had on a bright red jacket and a tall black hat. He had a big smile as he waved at the townspeople.

“Come to the circus! See the amazing acts! Enjoy the circus!” he repeated over and over.

After the last wagon in the parade left, Jerry ran to follow. He was ready to go to work and prove to the owner he would be a good worker. Then he would get to be a clown.

When he caught up with the circus, he could not believe how busy everyone was. As soon as the circus had arrived at the field, the work began. People were running from place to place carrying the things that needed to be put in just the right spot for the circus to be its very best.

“Young man, come here. I have something for you to do,” one of the workers yelled over at Jerry.

He ran to where the man was and asked what he was supposed to do. The man put a large box in his hands and pointed to where he wanted it to go. Jerry was used to carrying boxes from place to place while he worked in the store, so it was not hard for him to do it.

When he set the box down, another man told him to grab a rope and pull as hard as he could. He picked up the rope and followed the other workers' examples. As soon as the rope was tight and set into the ground on a big stake, he moved to another one and did the same thing. Soon he could see the tent going up. It looked so big and white. From rope to rope he moved until the tent was standing.

He was not finished. Now he had to help carry more boxes inside the tent. He followed the other workers as they changed the empty field into a real circus.

When the work was finally finished, it was dark. The workers thanked Jerry and offered him some dinner, but he was too tired to think about eating.

As he walked home, he began to think about how much work it was to be in a

circus. Everyone had a job to do and they did them very well.

Every week they would set up the circus for two days, then take it down, only to move to another town and do it all over again. It was a lot more work than he had ever thought.

When he got home, he went to his room and lay on his bed.

Suddenly he had a thought. The circus owner had not talked to him. He did not know if he was going to be in the circus the next day.

Jerry was too tired to worry about it then. He thought he would just try to find the owner the next day.

It was early when Jerry woke up. He was sore from the work the day before. He went downstairs to the kitchen to get something to eat.

When he opened the door, standing in the kitchen was the owner. He was talking to Jerry's parents.

"Hello Jerry, how are you this morning?" the owner asked.

"Actually, I'm a little sore," Jerry responded, rubbing his shoulders.

"You did a fine job yesterday. My men told me you were a big help. I'm here to offer you the opportunity to be a clown! Are you interested?" he asked.

"AM I?! You bet! Of course, that is what I have always wanted to do." Jerry yelled while jumping in the air with excitement.

"We need to leave now. Is there anything you need to bring with you?" the owner asked.

"Yes, hold on. I'll be right back," Jerry answered, as he turned to go up to his room.

Shortly afterward, Jerry returned with a bag.

"What's that for?" the owner asked.

"It's my costume. I'll be ready in no time!" Jerry replied.

"That sounds fine. I'm looking forward to seeing you in your costume," the owner chuckled.

The owner and Jerry left the house and walked together.

As they left the house, the owner questioned Jerry, “Your parents have told me that you want to join the circus to be a clown. Is this correct?”

“That’s right, but until yesterday, I didn’t know how much work it was going to be. Setting up the tents was really hard work,” Jerry answered.

“Wait until we have to pack everything to go to the next town!” the owner laughed.

When they got to the tent, the owner had Jerry follow one of the workers to the dressing room.

As he walked in, he saw people running everywhere. It was really busy. The man showed Jerry where he should go to change his clothes, and then told him to go to one of the makeup tables along the wall. A makeup artist would put makeup on him when he was ready.

Jerry did as he was told. He put on the costume his mother had made for him the summer before. When the people looked over at him, they were smiling. One of the young ladies working in the circus, came to him and complemented his costume.

“I really like your clothes. Where did you get them?” she asked.

“My mom made them for me,” he responded.

“She did a nice job. OK, now let me get your face on,” the young lady said as she began to put white paint all over his face.

It took almost thirty minutes to finish. When Jerry looked into the mirror, he was amazed. He looked so different and so funny.

One of the clowns came over to him and told him it was almost time to start. When the music started, the performers were to go into the tent. He told Jerry he looked great.

“Just go out there and have fun. The more fun you have, the more fun the people will have,” the clown instructed him.

Jerry was nervous, but also excited. This is what he had dreamed about for a long time.

The music began to play. The big curtains opened, and all the performers ran into

the tent. Jerry was smiling. He watched the other clowns and how funny they were. He tried some of the things they were doing, but he was not very good at it. This just made the people laugh.

Not knowing what else to do, he took out the three balls from his pocket and began to juggle as he walked. Sometimes he would drop one and then the people would laugh. He threw the balls higher into the air, and the people clapped. He tried many different tricks. When they did not work, the people just laughed. They thought it was part of the act. Even though everyone was from the local area, no one knew it was Jerry.

During the performance, Jerry and the clowns went into the tent three times to entertain the people. The audience was laughing and enjoying the show. This made Jerry very happy.

After the show, and after Jerry was out of his costume, he was thankful to the owner for giving him the chance to be in the circus.

Jerry was exhausted when he got home. He went directly to his room and fell asleep almost as soon as he hit his bed.

The next day, Christopher came over to see Jerry.

“Where were you yesterday? We didn’t see you anywhere.” Christopher inquired. “You were so excited to see the circus, what happened? You didn’t even go.”

“I was there. Didn’t you see me? I was a clown. Didn’t you recognize my costume?” Jerry said with a big smile on his face.

“That was you?!” Christopher asked. “You did a great job. You made me laugh.”

They talked while Jerry began to do his chores around the store.

Not too much later, the owner of the circus walked in.

“Hello Jerry, how are you today?” he asked with a smile on his face.

“I’m tired, but happy,” Jerry answered. “Would you like to talk to my parents?”

“Yes, are they around?” he requested.

“Just a second, I’ll get them,” Jerry answered.

He went to the storeroom, told his parents Mr. Roberts was in the store, and that he

wanted to talk to them.

Mr. Roberts talked for a long time with Jerry's parents.

"Jerry, come here a moment please," Jerry's father called out. "Mr. Roberts has something to ask you."

The circus owner asked, "Jerry, how would you like to join our circus for the rest of the summer?"

"Really?" Jerry blurted out and then turned to his parent, "Is it OK with you, mom and dad?"

"Yes, it's OK with us. You will travel with Mr. Roberts and he'll make sure that you are safe. We'll miss you, but we know this will be a wonderful experience for you," his mom said to him.

Christopher was happy for Jerry.

"It's sure going to be quiet around here without you," Christopher said to Jerry.

"I'm going on a great adventure!" Jerry said as he ran upstairs to pack his things.

He went with the circus for the remainder of the summer. When he returned, he had grown taller and was much stronger, but he had the same smile on his face.

Best of all, the owner invited him to join the circus again the next summer!

VOCABULARY (*Match the word to its definition*)

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. actors _____ | a. clothing, getup, outfit |
| 2. sewing box _____ | b. form to apply for a job |
| 3. apologize _____ | c. place to keep needles and thread |
| 4. daydream _____ | d. place to buy different things |
| 5. makeup _____ | e. distracted, fantasize |
| 6. compliment _____ | f. toss balls in the air |
| 7. costume _____ | g. to say, "I'm sorry." |
| 8. application _____ | h. paint on the face |
| 9. juggle _____ | i. performers, players |
| 10. general store _____ | j. praise, say nice things |

TRUE OR FALSE

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Jerry worked for his parents. | T / F |
| 2. Jerry wanted to be a lion tamer. | T / F |
| 3. The owner asked Jerry to join the circus. | T / F |
| 4. Christopher worked for the circus. | T / F |
| 5. The owner of the circus was Mr. Thomas. | T / F |
| 6. Jerry's costume was made by his mother. | T / F |
| 7. The pencil was in the desk in the office. | T / F |
| 8. Jerry found an advertisement on a lamppost. | T / F |
| 9. Jerry's friends always played circus clowns. | T / F |
| 10. Jerry became a clown. | T / F |

MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. Jerry's parents owned a what? _____
 - a. drugstore
 - b. cafe
 - c. supermarket
 - d. general store

2. Who made Jerry's clown costume? _____
 - a. father
 - b. mother
 - c. Christopher
 - d. Jerry

3. What day did the circus begin? _____
 - a. Monday
 - b. Friday
 - c. Sunday
 - d. Saturday

4. Who was the owner of the circus?
 - a. Mr. Thomas
 - b. Mr. Jones
 - c. Mr. Roberts
 - d. Mr. Ames

COMPREHENSION: *(Write a complete sentence to answer the question.)*

1. What did Jerry want to be?

2. Where did Jerry first go to find information about clowns in America?

3. What trick did Jerry try to learn?

4. What day was the parade through the town?

5. Why was Jerry tired when he got home?

6. Who did not see Jerry in the circus?

7. What was Christopher doing when Jerry went to tell him about the circus?

8. What did Jerry learn in gymnastics class?

9. Who came to the store to ask Jerry to join the circus for the summer?

10. How long was Jerry gone?
