

The circus is coming!

‘Look!’ Molly said. ‘The circus is coming to town. Can we go, Mum? Can we, please?’

Beside the road to town, a red and yellow sign said BURTON’S CIRCUS – COMING SOON! There were pictures of a circus tent, horses and clowns.

We went to the circus once. I was twelve then, and Molly was nine. We all loved it, Mum and Dad too.

That was before Dad’s accident.

‘No, Molly,’ Mum said. ‘We can’t.’

‘Why not? I want to see the acrobats and the clowns – and the horses!’

‘Molly, we don’t have the money.’

After Dad’s accident, we didn’t have the money for lots of things.

Molly turned to me. ‘But Steve, you want to go to the circus, don’t you?’

‘Molly,’ I said. ‘We can’t. Be quiet.’

I wanted to do lots of things. I was fifteen. I wanted to play football, go to the cinema with my friends, have fun. Be a teenager. The summer holidays started in two weeks. I wanted to go to the coast. I wanted to go swimming and have fun. Our family owned a little caravan, and we took it to the coast for a week every summer. But not last summer, not after Dad’s accident.

I had to work on the farm and go to school. There was no time to have any fun now. And no money.

Mum worked hard. Molly did too. But there was always more to do. After his accident, Dad stopped working on the



farm. He sat in the kitchen all day. It was hard to talk to him.

‘It’s not fair!’ Molly said.

‘Yes, you’re right. It’s not fair,’ I told her. ‘But things will get better.’

‘When?’ asked Molly.

‘Don’t ask,’ Mum said. She stopped outside the bank. This was after school on Friday. The bank was going to close soon.

‘You two, go and do the food shopping, please,’ Mum said. She gave me the list, then she hurried into the bank.

When Molly and I got back to the car with the food, Mum wasn’t there. We waited for her.

‘When will things get better?’ Molly asked me again.

‘Well, Dad has to have that big operation on his hip. But ...’ I stopped.

‘I know. We don’t have the money for that,’ Molly said. ‘When will Dad be Dad again?’

Two men were walking slowly along the street, talking. They didn’t look happy. They stopped near us, outside the bank. Just then, Mum came out of the bank. She waved at us.

‘What can we do, Lex?’ one of the men said to the other. He was tall and about Dad’s age. ‘We always stay in the park beside the river in this town.’

‘I don’t know,’ said the other man. He was older. ‘But after all that rain, the ground is too wet for us.’

‘The others will be here in two hours. We have to find a place for the circus,’ said the first man.

‘This is bad, very bad,’ the older man said. ‘We need time to rehearse our new acts before our summer shows. We always rehearse our new acts here. Where can we stay for two weeks?’

Mum walked over to the men. ‘Excuse me,’ she said, ‘but I heard you talking about needing a place to stay.’

‘Oh, er, yes. Hello,’ the tall man said. ‘I’m Gavin Burton.’

‘Of Burton’s Circus?’ Molly asked.

‘Yes,’ the man smiled. ‘And this is my uncle, Lex.’

Mum said, 'Hi. I'm Kate Sullivan. And these are my children, Steve and Molly.'

'Nice to meet you all,' said Gavin.

Mum smiled. 'I think we can help you. Our farm is close to town. And we have a big field beside the road. Maybe your circus can stay there. The ground there is dry. It's high above the river.'

Gavin turned to Lex. Lex nodded.

'That could be good,' Gavin said to Mum, smiling.

'Very good,' said Lex.

'Do you pay to stay in the park?' Mum asked.

'Oh, yes,' said Lex. 'We pay money to the town.'

Mum said, 'Good. We need the money – my husband can't work at the moment.'

'I'm sorry to hear that,' said Gavin. 'We're happy to pay you. When can we look at your field?'

'You can come and look now,' Mum said. 'Where's your car? Follow us.'

When we were driving out of town, I said, 'Dad won't be happy. There's good grass for the cows in that field.'

'Steve – stop. We need the money. I have to pay the bank. And Molly needs new shoes. And maybe we can pay for Dad's operation.'

'Well, Molly,' I said. 'We're not going to the circus ... the circus is coming to us!'

Too much to do

‘No, Kate,’ Dad said angrily. ‘Tell them they can’t come. This isn’t a park. It’s a farm. *Our* farm.’

‘But we need the money, Harry.’

Molly and I ate our afternoon tea quickly. Molly went out to feed her goats. She had two pet goats, Bonnie and Clyde. Dad didn’t like pets. He always said, ‘Farm animals need to work.’ Molly’s goats *did* work. They ate the grass around the house. But they were her pets too.

I sat and finished my cup of tea. ‘You’re right, Dad,’ I said. ‘It’s not going to be easy. But Mum’s right. We need the money, and we need it now.’

Dad looked at me. ‘I didn’t ask you, Steve.’

‘But Dad, you said it’s our farm. I’m doing your work –’

Mum said, ‘Please move the cows from that field, Steve. Do it now. The circus will be here soon.’

I turned to Dad. ‘Dad?’ I asked. ‘Shall I move them?’

Dad looked down at the floor. He closed his eyes, then said, ‘Yes. Do it.’

I went outside and called for Patch. She was my dog. She wasn’t a pet. She worked very hard on the farm.

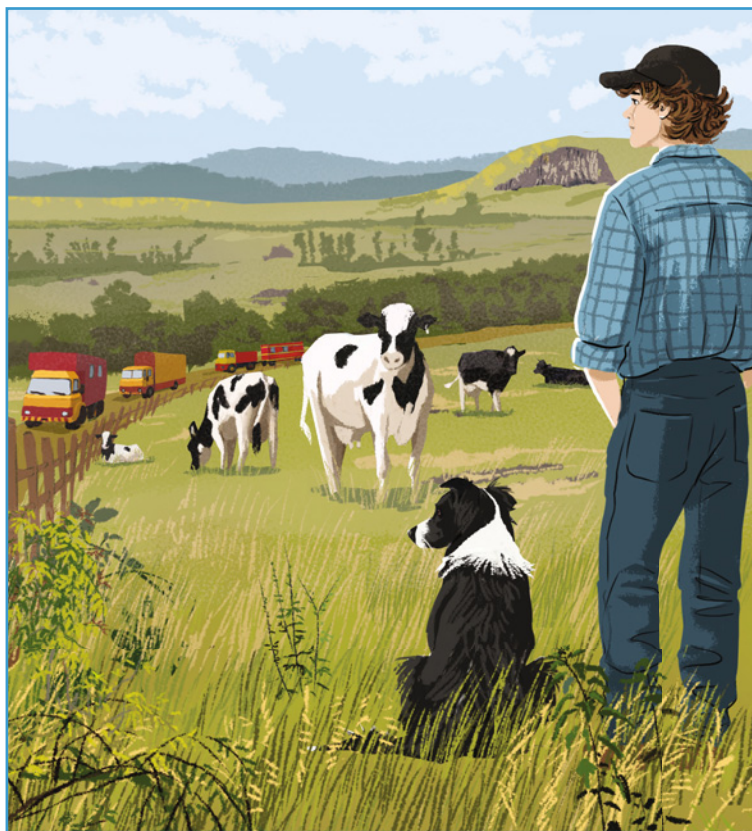
Patch helped me to get the cows out of the top field, but I wasn’t happy about it. There was no grass for the cows in the second field.

More work, I thought. I’ll have to bring them hay every morning and every evening. And my exams are next week. I don’t have time!

I wanted to do well at school then go to university. I wanted to be a vet. Dad wasn’t happy about that. He wanted

me to stay and be a farmer. But I didn't want to. I always said to him, 'Farmers need vets, Dad. Molly can stay. She loves it here.' But Dad wanted me – the boy – to stay. And after his accident, I couldn't talk about leaving. But I could dream.

Patch and I were moving the cows from the top field when I heard a lot of trucks driving towards us. 'Hurry, Patch,' I called. 'Get those last cows into the other field now! The circus is here.' Patch ran to get the cows.



First, there were four big trucks. They had pictures of circus acts on them, with BURTON'S CIRCUS in big red and yellow letters. Behind those trucks were several smaller trucks. Two were food trucks. One had pictures of hot dogs on it. Another had drinks, popcorn and lollipops. One small truck had laughing clowns on it. Molly loved the laughing clowns game when we went to the circus that time. She wanted to win a big teddy bear but she won a little toy monkey. Behind all the trucks were some caravans. These were not brightly coloured.

The circus people live in those, I thought.

And behind the caravans was a truck with high windows.

Aha! They have animals! I thought.

Patch barked.

'You're right, Patch,' I said. 'The cows don't like this!'

Four cows were still in the field. They started running away from Patch and me. Someone jumped down from the first truck and opened the gate onto the road. He was a teenager, about my age. The cows ran towards the open gate – towards the road!

'Hey, stop!' I shouted. 'Don't let the cows get out!' I ran over and closed the gate. I was really annoyed.

'Hurry up, farm boy,' he said. 'We're paying for this field.'

'Wait a few minutes,' I said. 'I'll be quick.'

He looked annoyed. 'Get moving, then.'

I called Patch and we moved the last cows out of the field. I closed the gate between the fields. Then I waved and called out, 'Okay, you can open that gate again.'

I walked over to him. I was annoyed, but I had to be nice to the circus people. They were paying us well.

'Sorry about that,' I said to the teenager. 'I'm Steve. My family owns this farm.'

‘I’m Nate Burton. My family owns this circus. And we need to get the trucks and caravans off the road. Now.’

He waved to the first truck.

‘So, you’re a circus family,’ I said to Nate. ‘I bet that’s fun.’

He looked at me. ‘Yeah. We see the country, go everywhere and people love us. People want to join the circus – I was born into the circus life.’

‘You’re lucky.’

‘Our next stop is on the coast. We’ll be there for a month.’

‘I love going to the coast,’ I said. ‘But we’re not going this year.’

He looked around. ‘I bet there are things to love about farm life. Like talking to cows and watching the grass grow.’

‘Hey, I was trying to be friendly,’ I said.

He walked away.

‘Nate,’ I shouted. ‘Don’t step in the –’

Too late.

‘Sorry,’ I said. ‘But the cows have been in this field for a month.’ I laughed.

‘Shut up!’ Nate was very angry. ‘And go away.’

‘Sorry,’ I said again, but it was funny.

Patch and I watched the circus people from the next field. They worked quickly. They put up the big top, their red and yellow tent. They put up smaller tents near it. Most of their trucks and caravans were behind the big top.

It was all very noisy, and everyone was busy. I saw Nate here and there. He helped to put up the big tent. Then he and another man carried some fences out of a truck. They made a ring with the fences. Then they carried out some hay.

I heard Nate call out, ‘You can bring them out now.’

Someone opened the big back door of one truck. The door was a ramp. And down the ramp came four horses. The

first horse was black, the second was chestnut with a white blaze, and two were white.

‘Ooh,’ I said to Patch. ‘Molly is going to love those horses!’

Having the circus on our farm was going to be hard, but it was going to be fun too. When I was a boy, I dreamed of joining the circus. Now there was a circus here on our farm!


Nate called out to me, ‘Don’t you have work to do, farm boy?’

My dreams never had annoying circus boys in them. I called Patch and we went back to the farmhouse.

Dad shouted from the back porch, ‘Where have you been, Steve? It’s time to milk the cows.’

This is the German version of **Joining the Circus**

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