

# UNDER THE BIG TOP

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## Chapter One

# CLOWNING AROUND

Jayden and Jaya are champion gymnasts. They are twins. People crowd around to watch their acrobatics. They train long hours. They dream of becoming big stars some day.

One day, after they win a competition, a man approaches them. He wears a tall top hat and a black coat with long tails.

“You both are amazing,” he says. “I could use kids who do such good backflips.”

He hands them a card.

“My name is Luke,” he says. “I am ringmaster of the Big Top Circus. I am looking for new acrobats for our summer program. You two would be perfect!”

Jayden and Jaya always wanted to join the circus.

“This sounds like a great opportunity,” Mom says. “Let’s do it!”

Ringmaster Luke tells them to meet him at the Big Top Circus.

The kids pack their bags and get into the car. Before long, they come upon two clowns. They are rushing in the opposite direction.

“Excuse me, isn’t the circus the other way?” Mom asks.



“Yeah, but I’m out of here!” yells one clown.

“I’ve had enough, too!” yells the other.

The twins wonder what’s going on, but they don’t have time to ask.

“I think I hear circus music,” Jaya says.

Mom stops the car. Up ahead, they see Ringmaster Luke.

“Am I glad to see you! Two of my clowns just quit! So now you have a choice,” says the ringmaster. “Would you like to be acrobats or clowns? If you want to be clowns, you get to work with our head clown, Bingo.”

“Clowning around sounds like fun!” exclaims Jayden.

“We could dress up as sad or silly clowns. We could do tricks and acrobatics,” adds Jaya.

“That would be great,” says Jayden, doing a backflip.

“We want to be clowns,” they say together.



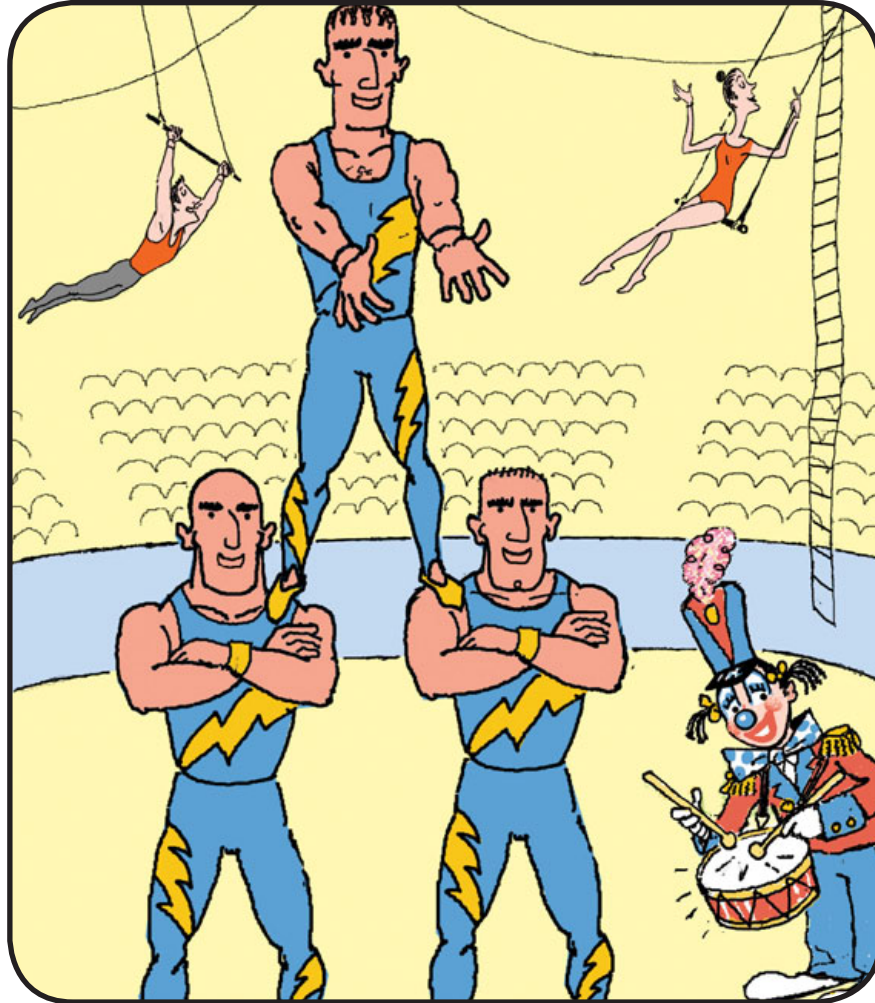
## Chapter Two

# ELLIE-FRIEND

Ringmaster Luke walks the kids over to a big, round clown.

“This is Bingo,” he says.

Bingo gives a big smile and a handshake. But as the ringmaster leaves, Bingo’s smile becomes a frown.



“Hurry up,” grunts Bingo. The twins follow Bingo into a large, colorful tent. Soon they find themselves inside the big top!

They stop to watch a balancing act.

Bingo gives them a bad look.



“If you’re going to be slowpokes, you both should leave,” he snaps.

“What a mean clown,” whispers Jayden.

“Let’s be nice anyway,” Jaya whispers back.

“I heard you’re the best juggler here,” Jaya says to the clown.

“I can also juggle three or ...”

Bingo cuts her off. “I don’t care. Let’s get to work.”

*Maybe that’s why the other clowns ran away, Jayden thinks.*

Bingo leads the kids into the ring. He introduces them to a big, gray elephant.

“Meet Ellie,” he says. “She’s a big part of our act. Get it? BIG PART! Ha!”

The twins look at Ellie. Her head is down. She looks upset. They don’t laugh at all. Bingo gets angry.

“Let’s get one thing straight. You are only new clowns in training. Now take these!”

Bingo hands Jayden a bucket and gives Jaya a long broom.

“The first part of your job is to clean Ellie’s droppings. Have fun at the circus,” smirks Bingo.

The kids start sweeping.

“Maybe we should just go home,” says Jayden.

Just then, Bingo yells at Ellie. “Move your big body, Ellie-phat!” he says, laughing.



Ellie looks at the kids with big, sad eyes.

“I think we should stay to help her,” Jaya decides.

The kids go up to Ellie and whisper in her ear. “Has Bingo been really mean to you? Don’t worry. We’ll take care of you. From now on, you’re not just any elephant. You’re our Ellie-friend.”

Ellie gently touches their heads with her trunk.

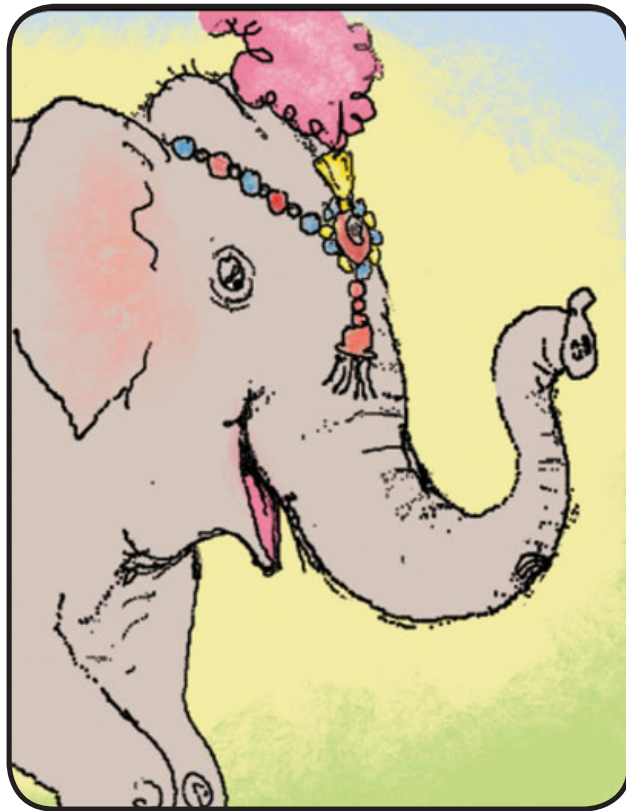
## Chapter Three

# BIG STARS UNDER THE BIG TOP

Every day, the kids wash and feed Ellie. She is sweet and smart. This gives them an idea. Maybe they should put together a new act.

“We could call it Ellie and the Tumbling Twins,” grins Jaya.

“We could do fun tricks, like balance on balls and jump through hoops. Ellie could catch peanuts as we ride her while standing on our heads,” exclaims Jayden.



They start training Ellie right away.

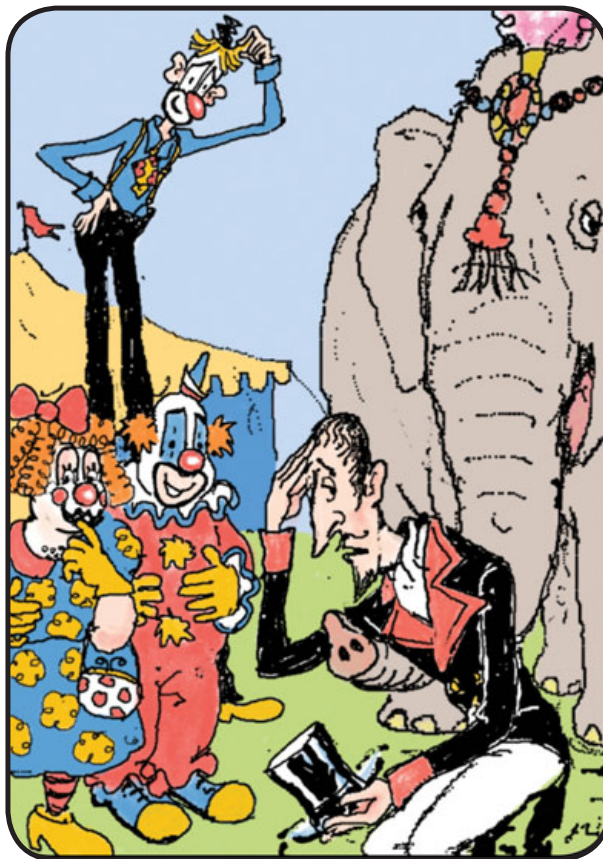
Bingo sees the kids practicing and yanks Ellie away.

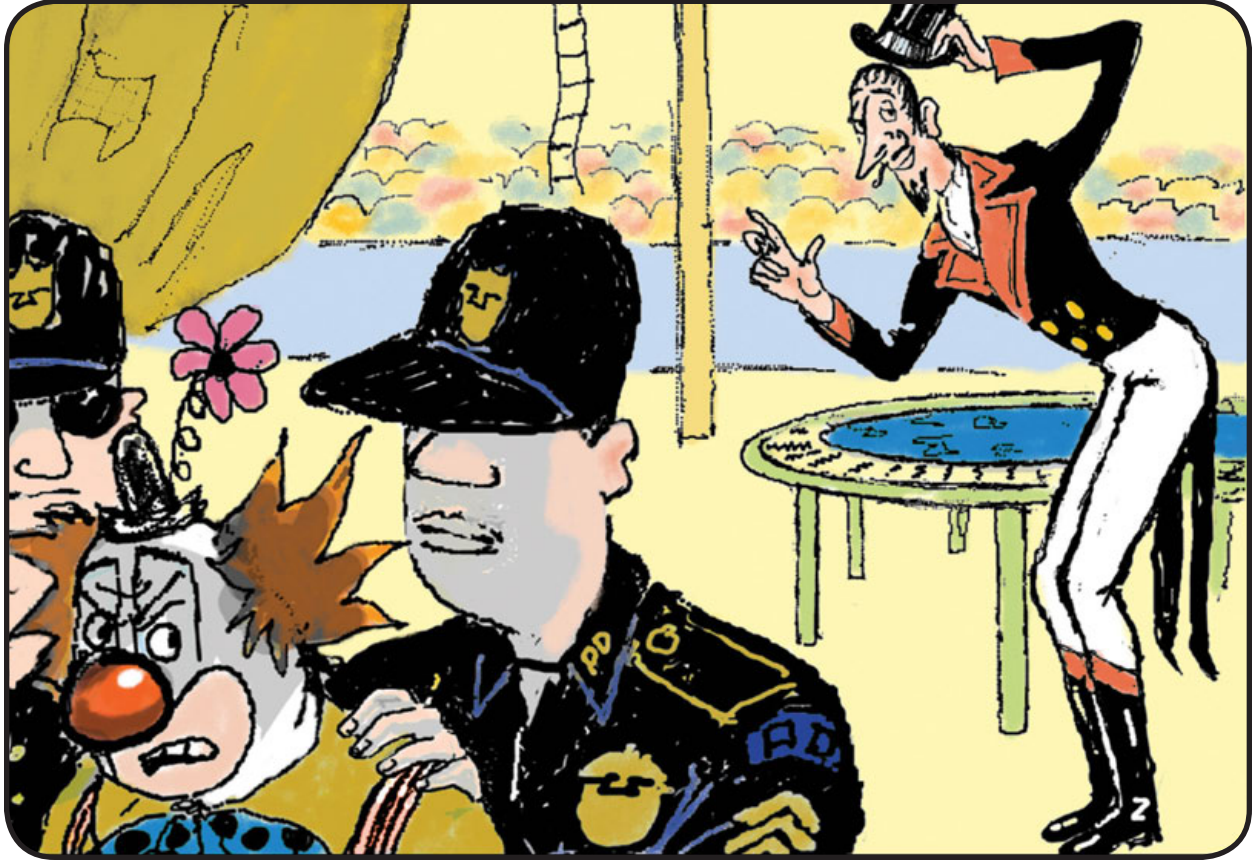
“Who said you could do a show? I’m locking Ellie up.”

They watch as Bingo pulls Ellie away.

“Enough is enough!” shouts Jaya.

The twins run over to Ringmaster Luke. Now, the other clowns also feel brave enough to tell on Bingo. The ringmaster is shocked to hear the news.





“In this circus, we’re kind to all animals,” he says.

He fires Bingo on the spot.

Then he pats the twins on the back.

“Good work,” he says. “But without Bingo, we’re missing our first act.”

“We think we can help,” Jayden says, grinning.

“We’ve been preparing something special,” Jaya says.

The ringmaster watches the twins rehearse. Then he looks away.

“What happened? Don’t you like it?” they ask.

“I don’t like it. I LOVE it!”

The twins perform their show on opening night. Their friends and family come to see it. They all get on their feet and clap like crazy.

“You did it, girl. I knew you could,” whispers Jaya to Ellie.

“Now we’re big stars under the big top,” says Jayden.

Ellie flaps her ears and taps the twins on their heads. From behind her great big trunk, they see something amazing forming — a beautiful elephant smile.

They do some great acts that summer. When it's time to go, they know they will miss Ellie the most.

“Bye, Ellie-friend! Don't be sad. We'll be back next summer!”

