

THE FARMERS' DAUGHTERS

GO THAT WAY, the Missus said, pointing or rather waving with her whole hand downtown. It isn't very far, ten or twelve blocks, on this—she motioned again—side of the park. You can walk.

Yes, I can walk, said the stocky new Finnish girl, Elsa, and looking at the Missus with her big blue eyes, she smiled brightly.

Um, said the Missus. Well, then walk. And come back by five o'clock. Five o'clock! She held up her hand with the five fingers spread wide. Five. You understand?

Elsa was hurt. Yes, I understand good. One, two, three, four, five. Five o'clock.

All right then, said the Missus. Out with you. And she held open the door of the apartment for the new maid to wheel the little go-cart through it. No, take that down first, right to the street. Then come back for the baby. I strong! Yes, I know, said the Missus, but be careful.

Saturday afternoon, cool air, but not too cool, the trio came at last to the high wire enclosure of the zoo and began following a group of children running ahead and calling back to a heavy-set man and woman to hurry. They were in before they knew it. And before they knew it they were standing in front of a rather narrow outdoor cage, containing an ape with a banana in his hand. He was sitting there peeling and eating it, darting looks about right and left from time to time though he was quite alone in the cage.

Elsa's mouth fell open in amazement. Lottie looked up at her and then at the animal. The beast finished the banana, threw down the skin and came to the front of the cage as though looking for more. Elsa turned to the people around her. There were six or eight of them watching. They seemed to think it very funny.

Flossie apparently didn't see anything.

Squirrels were running about over the grass. The maid with her two small charges went up and down among the outdoor enclosures. She saw wolves like dogs with fierce eyes, narrow-snouted foxes, and deer with astonishing, many branching horns, elk and bears in big strong cages against some rocks. But many of the cages were empty due to the beginning chill that was in the air and she did not quite dare venture as yet into the various houses here and there about her on either hand.

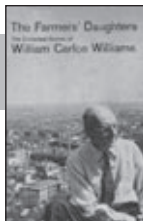
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She looked through the window of one low building half-covered with ivy where a peacock, all white, at large on the premises, was sitting quietly. Not two feet beyond it through the glass Elsa saw an enormous snake! She could only see part of it. She shuddered from head to foot. Not there, at any rate and hurried on dragging the children with her.

Why not go in? The Missus hadn't told her not to. Anyhow it was beginning to get cold walking around, and though the baby was happy and contented, maybe it would be warm in there. She would go. Here was one with cages outside and places for the birds to go inside, too. She would go in there to see the birds. She went to wheel her carriage through the door but a guard stopped her.

Can't go in there with baby carriages. There, he said, pointing. So Elsa was practically forced to do what the others were doing. She stood the carriage aside, carefully took the baby into her arms, told Lottie to come on and went through the door. She stopped short. The smell was appalling. Dead fish, dead something, anyhow foul, it gripped you in the throat, you could taste it. She made a face, looked right and left at others about her, but after a long moment, seeing many lively fowl before her, went ahead.

Once you got a little used to the fetid odor of the place, the din hit you. Shrieks and catcalls on all sides. The baby clung to the girl's neck. In a big central cage were ducks, and terns and gulls, some huddled on the sandy cage bottom, incredibly colored, others with their beaks open laughed loudly, so it seemed, with piercing volleys of calls about the cage, moving aside carefully as a big gray bird with a pouch under his chin took off from the pool and landed heavily among them wobbling forward a few additional steps before he could come to a stop. Some birds were brooding on barkless pieces of dead branches hung from above, two by two, all letting their droppings go when they would. Immediately in front of Elsa and the children a white, long-legged bird was feeding, sloshing his bill, spoon-shaped at the end, right and left sidewise through a pail of half-liquid stuff before him.



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The little servant circled the cage. About it were other birds in cages along the wall. She couldn't believe it. Long red and green legs that slowly moved about the narrow confines of the enclosure flexing and straightening—so long and thin you'd think they'd snap. Eyes and pointed bills . . . No! she turned uneasily, holding her breath—without appearing to hurry. Come, Lottie, she said. Let us go.

It was better in the air again. There was a water creature lying on its back or its belly, she couldn't tell which, on the rocks near a cold-looking pool. She went on, looking up at the sky quickly to see how much of the afternoon remained to her. As she passed along the edge of the pool there was a swirl of the water and a sharp pointed snout arose and barked once then the thing turned and with the speed of a serpent plunged under and was gone again.

Well, maybe that was enough. Perhaps she'd better go home. It was a long walk and the sun was already beginning to fade from its midday position in the sky. Still—maybe so, why not?

You want to go? she asked Lottie and the baby.

Go, go! the baby said earnestly.

You want to sit in the carriage? the little maid asked Lottie. Yes, that was what she wanted, Lottie assured her. So Lottie was seated at the foot of the little go-cart and, reassured, Elsa decided to continue her investigations a little further.

Going quietly along now, the flaxen-haired girl steered away from the crowd.

The house of the pachyderms admitted carriages; Elsa saw a woman working one up the three steps to the entrance and followed eagerly. Warm in here and high, and there were sparrows chattering up under the roof beam. And there was an elephant! Alone behind its bars one hind foot chained to an iron ring in the floor. There was a crowd before his cage.

Elsa saw what was going on. There was a man at the back tossing in hay with a fork and the enormous beast seemed to want to be loosened. But the man bowed his head and backed out through a small door at the rear and the elephant quieted down again. He didn't seem to want the hay but took a wisp of it in his trunk, rolled it up into a little bundle, raised it swingingly to his mouth and then as gracefully lowered his trunk again with the hay still in it, two or three times, before he ate it.

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Elsa watched every move, looked at the eye and the ears of the beast without stirring. Still swinging its stocky trunk as it rocked from foot to foot, the enormous beast suddenly uncurled it forward, through the bars toward the people standing there, opening the tip of it like a small hand begging. Elsa strained forward to see beyond the backs of the people before her as a child placed a peanut in the opening. The elephant, without a movement, still held the trunk there waiting.

The little blue-eyed maid woke as if from a dream when she heard Lottie say, I want to get down, and felt her struggling on her arm. She hadn't realized that she was holding her. Sighing as if she had forgotten to breathe for the last five minutes, Elsa suddenly recollected her duty toward her charges and turned away from the crowd once more.

But what astonished the little maid more than anything else was the head of the hippopotamus. Unlike the birds and many of the other beasts, here was something, alert as it seemed, that did not move. There was no more than a faint turning of the eye from time to time and a slow shift of the head hardly to be perceived. This was something beyond the imagination! The skin of an eel, the ears of a pig, but the mouth! The bulk of the head and the breadth of it! Incredible! The thing didn't yawn, it didn't rise or move. . . . Elsa looked into the faces of the people about her and discovered no wonder. She looked at the children and moved on.

These things lived naturally in all their deformity in the same world as she. What are they for? She did not know. The less than pig eyes of the rhinoceros and his broken horns! It made her shudder. And she was startled by their stillness, too. They hardly moved. Yet with that leathery bulk of insensitivity before her, she heard a distant rhythmic . . . ! Was it a cat had got into the place? She looked about. Again, an almost imperceptible small sound. No, it was the beast itself! It was the rhinoceros, mewing like a kitten.

The elephant, to the admiration of the crowd which grew silent at this point, let go its bladder—as though someone had dumped a barrel of stale cider down a drain.

Come, Lottie! said the girl.



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It was an exciting game. In one house there was a very small dainty-footed deer, no bigger than a terrier, walking quickly up and down inside the bars while another, the same, was lying curled up, its head upon its flanks asleep in the straw. Kangaroos, red and gray, powerful and delicate, one of them sitting upright upon its fat tail, the forefeet with their narrow wrists dangling idly.

Zigzag went the little maid about the room, the wild swine with coarse black hair, curling tusks and knobs of crusted filth, she thought, between them where he couldn't scratch. Was it from that or—in the next cage again beyond belief—that there came such an overpowering stench!

Elsa wanted to go but could not resist the desire to see this other thing. No head at all, just a slithering body tipped with a snout a yard long, armed with filthy eyes, tapering from a shaggy neck, the head no more than a slight bulge in the snout itself—on the body of, almost a bear! she thought.

Whew! that's terrible! she said aloud.

Lottie was already moving away.

Coated with long dangling wiry hair that swept the floor as the beast paced up and down, filthy with dust and straws, the tail a bulky hanging mass of long, spiny hairs dragging on the bottom of the cage—and powerful forelegs armed by one fierce long claw—whew! Terrible.

I'm tired, said Lottie. So Elsa loaded her once more into the foot of the carriage and started for home. But first—it was still so early—passing another building the little maid thought, Why not?

No, no, no! said Lottie.

Yes, said Elsa. So she parked the carriage. It was getting to be an old thing now, took the baby in her arms, Lottie by the hand in spite of her hanging back, and went in behind some others. It was just before three o'clock; she saw it by her big watch which she always carried by a chain in her pocket.

Timid but responsible at the same time, Elsa saw at once that she was among the lions. She got just inside the door and there she stood. On the right were the cages, while along the other side of the room, up three steps, was a row of benches all occupied.

Most of the people were at the other end of the room whither several newcomers hurried, leaving the little blonde maid and the two children almost alone. The people on the benches were looking at her. She didn't understand.

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But near her in the first, no, the second, cage, next to two big black cats with green eyes, was an enormous shaggy-maned lion pacing alone up and down inside bars. Now he would come toward the young girl with the two children then turn away again to the far corner of his cage, stop, press his heavy head forward into the bars, trying to look around the corner, up beyond, then drop his head, turn and come down the face of the bars again. Back he would go once more. Look and return. Elsa didn't move.

Then the beast stopped. Cocked his ears. Stared. Opened his jaws. And split the air with a terrifying voice of thunder.

The baby clung to the maid's neck and began to whimper. Lottie clung to her skirts. Elsa herself was spellbound—standing almost alone, not knowing whether to retreat or go farther.

I want to go home! said Lottie whimpering. The baby, loosening the little maid's neck a moment, turned her head around a little way timidly to see what had happened. Several ladies were laughing. Elsa flushed crimson.

This was no place for a child, said one of the women on the benches to her companion. Can you imagine a mother sending two small children out with a maid like that—in this crowd?

Pretty little thing, said the other. As much of a child as they are. This is going to be fun.

Then a commotion began at the other end of the room. There, they're going to feed them.

There was a scurry and a hubbub followed by fierce guttural roars. An attendant was going down the aisle between the spectators and the cages poking something in under the bars. Growls and roars, half-muffled, savage and repeated, menaced the ear. And then the big lion let go once more.

Lottie, bewildered, put her hands up to her ears and ran—forward into the room as Elsa clutched the baby which suddenly had again clutched her. The two ladies were pointing and laughing as Elsa went to grab Lottie and missed, caught her and tried to get hold of her hand. . . .

Another deafening roar.

In terror the little maid and the children escaped through the door nearest them.



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She must really go home now. She must. But to prove to Lottie that she mustn't be afraid . . . You want to see the monkeys? Then we go home. All right we see the monkeys.

Monkeys are funny in all languages—she'd try here—on her way to the exit—the last place and then go.

As she had hoped, they were funny, very funny. Even more than that, shocking. So that you felt the blood come into your face watching them. Never mind. Nobody else seemed to.

You could hardly follow them, quick as birds. So surprised they always looked. Frightened. Fear is written in all their faces. And their faces never change. Hands and feet and tails made for getting away.

She didn't hurry this time, she had learned what to do—but there were already too many people inside. Nevertheless, nothing ventured nothing won; she'd go ahead.

Monkeys on all sides! Little ones blinking and clinging to the bars, calling, looking furtively at their fellows, eating, scratching or walking slowly about. After all, Elsa was doing no more than the others about her. There were a number of men and women with children of all ages.

Monkeys! Oh, look, monkeys! Wouldn't you get lost in the cage with the monkeys?

This is the monkey house, what else do you expect to find here?

Look at the old man up there thinking!

Elsa didn't know what they were saying exactly. But as she followed the direction of the pointing fingers, sure enough . . . ! She stared with her mouth open where, on a perch, at the very top of a cage which she had thought empty, was the dark and huddled figure of a man-like ape. He was black-haired and looking down at the crowd below him had, his hand supporting the lower part of his face, half-covering his mouth, the appearance of thinking.

Monkeys are interesting people, said a tall woman to a man beside her. But Elsa could not get over her astonishment. No ungainly bird's legs, the colors of the rainbow, here, nor hippopotamus and rhinoceros heads of misshapen bone and blubber, hides like armor, not even the grace of a deer—but a sort of people in contour and motion.

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The black, thoughtful creature rubbed his hand over his eyes while what seemed to be his wife along the same shelf, a little smaller, held a piece of paper in her hand putting it to her mouth now and then nibbling, then puffing out her lips and blowing her breath through them with a soft high-pitched clatter. She moved about more than her mate, but neither one was particularly active.

In this house the crowd was getting to be almost impassable. It was entrancing, the most exciting place in the whole gardens. Baboons, walking stiffly on all fours, whose behinds when they turned from the astonished Elsa were blue and crimson. A shriek of laughter went up from several young girls whenever the beast would turn away from them.

And opposite them long-armed gibbons swinging from the cage wall, to the trapeze, to the iron upright in the cage's middle in prodigious leaps, never failing, up and down and around with lightning agility.

Suddenly a great roar of laughter went up from the far end of the building. Then it quieted and as suddenly burst out again in gales of merriment. The call was irresistible. Elsa was drawn inevitably that way along with the rest.

As she came up, the thing was clapping its hands, excitedly, wildly. Then it leaped directly at the crowd! Elsa involuntarily shrank back, bumping into a fat woman who gave her a hard shove with her elbow. And the crowd let out another spasm of roars. The thing inside had disappeared into the back of its cage. Then it leaped again! It hit the bars with the whole weight of its body and clung there snarling and shaking from side to side.

What if it should get loose? Everybody was laughing, but Elsa could see that the beast was furious. He hated the crowd. He wanted to kill them. She could see that. Where was Lottie? Lottie! Lottie! Lottie! The child had disappeared from her hand. Lottie!

The beast was waving its arms and now it spit. It spit into the crowd which laughed and gave way suddenly. And there was Lottie all alone. Elsa ran forward and grabbed her by the hand. Come. And this time she was through.

An attendant came and drove the beast toward the back of the cage. Go on, he said to the people. Go on. Keep moving. Don't stand in front of the cages.

Elsa was tired when she got back to the apartment. So were the children. Well, did you like it? the Missus said.

No, schtinks! said the little maid. I see elephant and many things. Well, some day you can go again, said the Missus. No, said Elsa. Schtinks! I see once, I see too much.

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