

# SATURN

MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE-FICTION

VOL. 1, No. 4

OCT. 1957

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# THE ELEPHANT CIRCUIT

by ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

*The exposition was easily the biggest John Watts had ever seen, and he'd seen them all. Yet, besides its size, there was something else strange about this fair—it was just a little out of this world!*

**R**AIN STREAMED across the bus's window. John Watts peered out at wooded hills, content despite the weather. As long as he was rolling, moving, traveling, the ache of loneliness was somewhat quenched. He could close his eyes and imagine that Martha was seated beside him.

They had always traveled together; they had honeymooned covering his sales territory. In time they had covered the entire country—Route 66, with the Indians' booths beside the highway, Route 1, up through the District, the Pennsylvania Turnpike, zipping in and out through the mountain tunnels, himself hunched over the wheel and Martha beside him, handling

the maps and figuring the mileage to their next stop.

He recalled one of Martha's friends saying, "But, dear, don't you get tired of it?"

He could hear Martha's bubbly laugh. "With forty-eight wide and wonderful states to see, grow *tired*? Besides, there is always something new—fairs and expositions and things."

"But when you've seen one fair you've seen them all."

"You think there is no difference between the Santa Barbara Fiesta and the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show? Anyhow," Martha had gone on, "Johnny and I are country cousins; we like to stare at the tall buildings and get freckles on the roofs of our mouths."

"Do be sensible, Martha." The woman had turned to him. "John, isn't it time that you two were settling down and making something out of your lives?"

Such people tired him. "It's for the 'possums," he had told her solemnly. "They like to travel."

The opossums? What in the world is he talking about, Martha?"

Martha had shot him a private glance, then dead-panned, "Oh, I'm sorry! You see, Johnny raises baby 'possums in his umbilicus."

"I'm equipped for it," he had confirmed, patting his round stomach.

That had settled her hash! He had never been able to stand people who gave advice "for you own good."

Martha had read somewhere that a litter of new-born opossums would no more than fill a teaspoon and that as many as six in a litter were often orphans through lack of facilities in mother 'possum's pouch to take care of them all. They had immediately formed the Society for the Rescue and Sustenance of the Other Six 'Possums, and Johnny himself had been unanimously selected

—by Martha—as the site of Father Johnny's 'Possum Town.

They had had other imaginary pets, too. Martha and he had hoped for children; when none came, their family had filled out with invisible little animals: Mr. Jenkins, the little grey burro who advised them about motels, Chipmink the chattering chipmunk, who lived in the glove compartment, *Mus Followalongus* the traveling mouse, who never said anything but who would bite unexpectedly, especially around Martha's knees.

They were all gone now; they had gradually faded away for lack of Martha's gay, infectious spirit to keep them in health. Even Bindlestiff, who was not invisible, was no longer with him. Bindlestiff was a dog they had picked up beside the road, far out in the desert, given water and succor and received in return his large and uncritical heart. Bindlestiff had traveled with them thereafter, until he, too, had been called away, shortly after Martha.

John Watts wondered about Bindlestiff. Did he roam free in the Dog Star, in a land lush with rabbits and uncovered

garbage pails? More likely he was with Martha, sitting on her feet and getting in the way. Johnny hoped so.

HE SIGHED and turned his attention to the passengers. A thin, very elderly woman leaned across the aisle and said, "Going to the Fair, young man?"

He started. It was twenty years since anyone had called him "young man." "Unh? Yes, certainly." They were *all* going to the Fair; the bus was a special.

"You like going to fairs?"

"Very much." He knew that her inane remarks were formal gambits to start a conversation. He did not resent it; lonely old women have need of talk with strangers—and so did he. Besides, he liked perky old women. They seemed the very spirit of America to him, putting him in mind of church sociables and farm kitchens—and covered wagons.

"I like fairs, too," she went on. "I even used to exhibit—quince jelly and my Crossing-the-Jordan pattern."

"Blue ribbons, I'll bet."

"Some," she admitted, "but mostly I just liked to go to them. I'm Mrs. Alma Hill Ev-

ans. Mr. Evans was a great one for doings. Take the exposition when they opened the Panama Canal—but you wouldn't remember that."

John Watts admitted that he had not been there.

"It wasn't the best of the lot, anyway. The Fair of '93, there was a fair for you! There'll never be one that'll even be a patch on that one."

"Until this one, perhaps?"

"This one? Pish and tush! Size isn't everything." The All-American Exposition would certainly be the biggest thing yet—and the best. If only Martha were along, it would seem like heaven. The old lady changed the subject. "You're a traveling man, aren't you?"

He hesitated, then answered, "Yes."

"I can always tell. What line are you in, young man?"

He hesitated longer, then said flatly, "I travel in elephants."

She looked at him sharply and he wanted to explain, but loyalty to Martha kept his mouth shut. Martha had insisted that they treat their calling seriously, never explaining, never apologizing. They had taken it up when he had planned to retire; they had

been talking of getting an acre of ground and doing something useful with radishes, or rabbits, or such. Then, during their final trip over his sales route, Martha had announced after a long silence, "John, you don't want to stop traveling."

"Eh? Don't I? You mean we should keep the territory?"

"No, that's done. But we won't settle down, either."

"What do you want to do? Just gypsy around?"

"Not exactly. I think we need some new line to travel in."

"Hardware? Shoes? Ladies' ready-to-wear?"

"No." She stopped to think. "We ought to travel in *something*. It gives point to your movements. I think it ought to be something that doesn't turn over too fast, so that we could have a really large territory, say the whole United States."

"Battleships perhaps?"

"Battleships are out of date, but that's close." Then they had passed a barn with a tattered circus poster. "I've got it!" she had shouted. "Elephants."

"Elephants, eh? Rather hard to carry samples."

"We don't need to. Every-

body knows what an elephant looks like. Isn't that right, Mr. Jenkins?" The invisible burro had agreed with Martha, as he always did; the matter was settled.

Martha had known just how to go about it. "First we make a survey. We'll have to comb the United States from corner to corner before we'll be ready to take orders."

For ten years they had conducted the survey. It was an excuse to visit every fair, zoo, exposition, stock show, circus, or punkin doings anywhere, for were they not all prospective customers? Even national parks and other natural wonders were included in the survey, for how was one to tell where a pressing need for an elephant might turn up? Martha had treated the matter with a straight face and had kept a dog-eared notebook: "La Brea Tar Pits, Los Angeles—surplus of elephants, obsolete type, in these parts about 25,000 years ago." "Philadelphia—sell at least six to the Union League." "Brookfield Zoo, Chicago—African elephants, rare." "Gallup, New Mexico—stone elephants east of town, very beautiul." "Riverside, California, Elephant

Barbershop—brace owner to buy mascot." "Portland, Oregon—query Douglas Fir Association. Recite *Road to Mandalay*. Same for Southern Pine group. N.B. this calls for trip to Gulf Coast as soon as we finish with rodeo in Laramie."

Ten years and they had enjoyed every mile of it. The survey was still unfinished when Martha had been taken. John wondered if she had button-holed Saint Peter about the elephant situation in the Holy City. He'd bet a nickel she had.

But he could not admit to a stranger that traveling in elephants was just his wife's excuse for traveling around the country they loved.

The old woman did not press the matter. "I knew a man once who sold mon-gooses," she said cheerfully. "Or is it 'mongeese?' He had been in the exterminator business and—what does that driver think he is doing?"

The big bus had been rolling along easily despite the driving rain. Now it was swerving, skidding. It lurched sickeningly—and crashed.

**J**OHAN WATTS banged his head against the seat in

front. He was picking himself up, dazed, not too sure where he was, when Mrs. Evans' thin, confident soprano oriented him. "Nothing to get excited about, folks. I've been expecting this—and you can see it didn't hurt a bit."

John Watts admitted that he himself was unhurt. He peered near-sightedly around, then fumbled on the sloping floor for his glasses. He found them, broken. He shrugged and put them aside; once they arrived he could dig a spare pair out of his bags.

"Now let's see what has happened," Mrs. Evans went on. "Come along, young man." He followed obediently.

The right wheel of the bus leaned drunkenly against the curb of the approach to a bridge. The driver was standing in the rain, dabbing at a cut on his cheek. "I couldn't help it," he was saying. "A dog ran across the road and I tried to avoid it."

"You might have killed us!" a woman complained.

"Don't cry till you're hurt," advised Mrs. Evans. "Now let's get back into the bus while the driver phones for someone to pick us up."

John Watts hung back to

peer over the side of the canyon spanned by the bridge. The ground dropped away steeply; almost under him were large, mean-looking rocks. He shivered and got back into the bus.

The relief car came along very promptly, or else he must have dozed. The latter, he decided, for the rain had stopped and the sun was breaking through the clouds. The relief driver thrust his head in the door and shouted, "Come on, folks! Time's a-wastin'! Climb out and climb in." Hurrying, John stumbled as he got aboard. The new driver gave him a hand. "'Smatter, Pop? Get shaken up?"

"I'm all right, thanks."

"Sure you are. Never better."

He found a seat by Mrs. Evans, who smiled and said, "Isn't it a heavenly day?"

He agreed. It *was* a beautiful day, now that the storm had broken. Great fleecy clouds tumbling up into warm blue sky, a smell of clean wet pavement, drenched fields and green things growing—he lay back and savored it. While he was soaking it up a great double rainbow formed and blazed in the eastern sky. He

looked at them and made two wishes, one for himself and one for Martha. The rainbows' colors seemed to be reflected in everything he saw. Even the other passengers seemed younger, happier, better dressed, now that the sun was out. He felt light-hearted, almost free from his aching loneliness.

They were there in jig time; the new driver more than made up the lost minutes. A great arch stretched across the road: THE ALL-AMERICAN CELEBRATION AND EXPOSITION OF ARTS and under it PEACE AND GOOD WILL TO ALL. They drove through and sighed to a stop.

Mrs. Evans hopped up. "Got a date—must run!" She trotted to the door, then called back, "See you on the midway, young man," and disappeared in the crowd.

John Watts got out last and turned to speak to the driver. "Oh, uh, about my baggage. I want to—"

The driver had started his engine again. "Don't worry about your baggage," he called out. "You'll be taken care of." The huge bus moved away.

"But—" John Watts stopped; the bus was gone. All very well—but what was he to

do without his glasses?

But there were sounds of carnival behind him, that decided him. After all, he thought, tomorrow will do. If anything is too far away for me to see, I can always walk closer. He joined the queue at the gate and went in.

**I**T WAS UNDENIABLY the greatest show ever assembled for the wonderment of mankind. It was twice as big as all outdoors, brighter than bright lights, newer than new, stupendous, magnificent, breathtaking, awe inspiring, supercolossal incredible—and a lot of fun. Every community in America had sent its own best to this amazing show. The marvels of P.T. Barnum, of Ripley, and of all Tom Edison's godsons had been gathered in one spot. From up and down a broad continent the riches of a richly endowed land and the products of a clever and industrious people had been assembled, along with their folk festivals, their annual blow outs, their celebrations, and their treasured carnival customs. The result was as American as strawberry shortcake and as gaudy as a Christ-

mas tree, and it all lay there before him, noisy and full of life and crowded with happy, holiday people.

Johnny Watts took a deep breath and plunged into it.

He started with the Fort Worth Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show and spent an hour admiring gentle, white-faced steers, as wide and square as flat-topped desks, scrubbed and curried, with their hair parted neatly from skull to base of spine, then day-old little black lambs on rubbery stalks of legs, too new to know themselves. fat ewes, their broad backs paddled flatter and fatter by grave-eyed boys intent on blue ribbons. Next door he found the Pomona Fair with solid matronly Percherons and dainty Palominos from the Kellogg Ranch.

And harness racing. Martha and he had always loved harness racing. He picked out a likely-looking nag of the famous Dan Patch line, bet and won, then moved on, as there was so much more to see. Other county fairs were just beyond, apples from Yakima, the cherry festival from Beaumont and Banning, Georgia's peaches. Somewhere off be-



yond him a band was beating out, "Ioway, Ioway, that's where the tall corn grows!"

Directly in front of him was a pink cotton candy booth.

Martha had loved the stuff. Whether at Madison Square Garden or at Imperial County's fair grounds she had always headed first for the cotton candy booth. "The big size, honey?" he muttered to himself. He felt that if he were to look around he would see her nodding. "The large size, please," he said to the vendor.

The carnie was elderly, dressed in a frock coat and stiff shirt. He handled the pink gossamer with dignified grace. "Certainly, sir, there is no other size." He twirled the paper cornucopia and presented it. Johnny handed him a half dollar. The man flexed and opened his fingers; the coin disappeared. That appeared to end the matter.

"The candy is fifty cents?" Johnny asked diffidently.

"Not at all, sir." The old showman plucked the coin from Johnny's lapel and handed it back. "On the house—I see you are with it. After all, what is money?"

"Why, thank you, but, uh, I'm not really 'with it,' you know."

The old man shrugged. "If you wish to go incognito, who am I to dispute you? But your money is no good here."

"Uh, if you say so."

"You will see."

He felt something brush against his leg. It was a dog of the same breed, or lack of breed, as Bindlestiff had been. It looked amazingly like Bindlestiff. The dog looked up and wagged its whole body.

"Why, hello, old fellow!" He patted it—then his eyes blurred; it even felt like Bindlestiff. "Are you lost, boy? Well, so am I. Maybe we had better stick together, eh? Are you hungry?"

The dog licked his hand. He turned to the cotton candy man. "Where can I buy hot dogs?"

"Just across the way, sir."

He thanked him, whistled to the dog, and hurried across. "A half dozen hot dogs, please."

"Coming up! Just mustard, or everything on?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I want them raw, they are for a dog."

"I getcha. Just a sec."

Presently he was handed six wienies, wrapped in paper.

"How much are they?"

"Compliments of the house."

"I beg pardon?"

"Every dog has his day. This is his."

"Oh. Well, thank you." He became aware of increased noise and excitement behind him and looked around to see the first of the floats of the Priests of Pallas, from Kansas City, coming down the street. His friend the dog saw it, too, and began to bark.

"Quiet, old fellow." He started to unwrap the meat. Someone whistled across the way; the dog darted between the floats and was gone. Johnny tried to follow, but was told to wait until the parade had passed. Between floats he caught glimpses of the dog, leaping up on a lady across the way. What with the dazzling lights of the floats and his own lack of glasses he could not see her clearly, but it was plain that the dog knew her; he was greeting her with the all-out enthusiasm only a dog can achieve.

He held up the package and tried to shout to her; she waved back, but the band music and the noise of the crowd made it impossible to hear each other. He decided to enjoy the parade, then cross and find the pooch and its mistress as soon as the last float had passed.

It seemed to him the finest Priests of Pallas parade he had ever seen. Come to think about it, there hadn't been a Priests of Pallas parade in a good many years. Must have revived it just for this.

That was like Kansas City—a grand town. He didn't know of any he liked as well. Possibly Seattle. And New Orleans, of course.

And Duluth—Duluth was swell. And so was Memphis. He would like to own a bus someday that ran from Memphis to Saint Joe, from Natchez to Moblie, wherever the wide winds blow.

Mobile—there was a town.

The parade was past now, with a swarm of small boys tagging after it. He hurried across.

The lady was not there, neither she, nor the dog. He looked quite thoroughly. No dog. No lady with a dog.

**H**E WANDERED off his eyes alert for marvels, but his thoughts on the dog. It really had been a great deal like *Bindlestiff*...and he wanted to know the lady it belonged to—anyone who could love that sort of a dog must be a pretty good sort herself. Perhaps he could buy her ice-

cream, or persuade her to do the midway with him. Martha would approve he was sure. Martha would know he wasn't up to anything.

Anyhow, no one ever took a little fat man seriously.

But there was too much going on to worry about it. He found himself at St. Paul's Winter Carnival, marvelously constructed in summer weather through the combined efforts of York and American. For fifty years it had been held in January, yet here it was, rubbing shoulders with the Pendleton Round-Up, the Fresno Raisin Festival, and Colonial Week in Annapolis. He got in at the tail end of the ice show, but in time for one of his favorite acts, the Old Smoothies, out of retirement for the occasion and gliding as perfectly as ever to the strains of *Shine On, Harvest Moon*.

His eyes blurred again and it was not his lack of glasses.

Coming out he passed a large sign. **SADIE HAWKINS DAY— STARTING POINT FOR BACHELORS.** He was tempted to take part; perhaps the lady with the dog might be among the spinsters. But he was a little tired by now: just ahead there was an

outdoor carnival of the pony-ride-and-ferris-wheel sort; a moment later he was on the merry-go-round and was climbing gratefully into one of those swan gondolas so favored by parents. He found a young man already seated there, reading a book.

"Oh, excuse me," said Johnny. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all," the young man answered and put his book down. "Perhaps you are the man I'm looking for."

"You are looking for someone?"

"Yes. You see, I'm a detective. I've always wanted to be one and now I am."

"Indeed?"

"Quite. Everyone rides the merry-go-round eventually, so it saves trouble to wait here. Of course, I could hang around Hollywood and Vine, or Times Square, or Canal Street, but here I can sit and read."

"How can you read while watching for someone?"

"Ah, I know what is in the book—" He held it up; it was *The Hunting of the Snark*. "—so that leaves my eyes free for watching."

Johnny began to like this young man. "Are there boojums about?"

"No, for we haven't softly and silently vanished away. But would we notice it if we did? I must think it over. Are you a detective, too?"

"No, I—uh—I travel in elephants."

"A fine profession. But not much for you here. We have giraffes—" He raised his voice above the music of the calliope and let his eyes rove around the carrousel. "—camels, two zebras, plenty of horses, but no elephants. Be sure to see the Big Parade; there will be elephants."

"Oh, I wouldn't miss it!"

"You mustn't. It will be the most amazing parade in all time, so long that it will never pass a given point and every mile choked with wonders more stupendous than the last. You're sure you're not the man I'm looking for?"

"I don't think so. But see here—how would you go about finding a lady with a dog in this crowd?"

"Well, if she comes here, I'll let you know. Better go down on Canal Street. Yes, I think if I were a lady with a dog I'd be down on Canal Street. Women love to mask; it means they can unmask."

Johnny stood up. "How do I get to Canal Street?"

"Straight through Central City past the opera house, then turn right at the Rose Bowl. Be careful then, for you pass through the Nebraska section with Ak-Sar-Ben in full sway. Anything could happen. After that, Calaveras County—Mind the frogs!—then Canal Street."

"Thank you so much." He followed the directions, keeping an-eye out for a lady with a dog. Nevertheless he stared with wonder at the things he saw as he threaded through the gay crowds. He did see a dog, but it was a seeing-eye dog—and that was a great wonder, too, for the live clear eyes of the dog's master could and did see everything that was going on around him, yet the man and the dog traveled together with the man letting the dog direct their way, as if no other way to travel were conceivable, or desired, by either one.

**H**E FOUND himself in Canal Street presently and the illusion was so complete that it was hard to believe that he had not been transported to New Orleans. Carnival was at height; it was Fat Tuesday here; the crowds were masked. He got a mask

from a street vendor and went on.

The hunt seemed hopeless. The street was choked by merry-makers watching the parade of the Krewe of Venus. It was hard to breathe, much harder to move and search. He eased into Bourbon Street—the entire French Quarter had been reproduced—when he saw the dog.

He was sure it was the dog. It was wearing a clown suit and a little peaked hat, but it looked like his dog. He corrected himself; it looked like Bindlestiff.

And it accepted one of the frankfurters gratefully. "Where is she, old fellow?" The dog woofed once, then darted away into the crowd. He tried to follow, but could not; he required more clearance. But he was not down-hearted; he had found the dog once, he would find him again. Besides, it had been at a masked ball that he had first met Martha, she a graceful Pierrette, he a fat Pierrot. They had watched the dawn come up after the ball and before the sun had set again they had agreed to marry.

He watched the crowd for Pierrettes, sure somehow that

the dog's mistress would costume so.

Everything about this fair made him think even more about Martha, if that were possible. How she had traveled his territory with him, how it had been their habit to start out, anywhere, whenever a vacation came along. Chuck the Duncan Hines guide and some bags in the car and be off. Martha...sitting beside him with the open highway a broad ribbon before them...singing their road song *America the Beautiful* and keeping him on key: "—thine alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears—"

Once she had said to him, while they were bowling along through—where was it? The Black Hills? The Ozarks? The Poconos? No matter. She had said, "Johnny, you'll never be President and I'll never be First Lady, but I'll bet we know more about the United States than any President ever has. Those busy, useful people never have time to see it, not really."

"It's a wonderful country, darling."

"It is, it is indeed. I could spend all eternity just traveling around in it—traveling in

elephants, Johnny, with you.”

He had reached over and patted her knee; he remembered how it felt.

The revellers in the mock French Quarter were thinning out; they had drifted away while he daydreamed. He stopped a red devil. “Where is everyone going?”

“To the parade, of course.”

“The Big Parade?”

“Yes, it’s forming now.” The red devil moved on, he followed.

His own sleeve was plucked. “Did you find her?” It was Mrs. Evans, slightly disguised by a black domino and clinging to the arm of a tall and elderly Uncle Sam.

“Eh? Why, hello, Mrs. Evans! What do you mean?”

“Don’t be silly. Did you find her?”

“How did you know I was looking for anyone?”

“Of course you were. Well, keep looking. We must go now.” They trailed after the mob.

The Big Parade was already passing by the time he reached its route. It did not matter, there was endlessly more to come. The Holly, Colorado Boosters were passing; they were followed by the prize

Shriner drill team. Then came the Veiled Prophet of Khorasan and his Queen of Love and Beauty, up from their cave in the bottom of the Mississippi . . . the Anniversary Day Parade from Brooklyn, with the school children carrying little American flags . . . the Rose Parade from Pasadena, miles of flower-covered floats . . . the Indian Powwow from Flagstaff twenty-two nations represented and no buck in the march wearing less than five hundred dollars worth of handwrought jewelry. After the indigenous Americans rode Buffalo Bill, goatee jutting out and hat in hand, locks flowing in the breeze. Then was the delegation from Hawaii, with King Kamehameha himself playing Alii, Lord of Carnival, with royal abandon, while his subjects in dew-fresh leis pranced behind him, giving aloha to all.

There was no end. Square dancers from Ojai and Cheyenne Mountain and from upstate New York, dames and gentlemen from Annapolis, the Cuero, Texas, Turkey Trot, all the Krewes and marching clubs of old New Orleans, double flambeaux blazing, nobles throwing favors to the crowd—the King of Zulus and his

smooth brown court, singing: *"Everybody who was anybody doubted it—"*

And the Mummers came, "taking a suit up the street" to *Oh Dem Golden Slippers*. Here was something older than the country celebrating it, the shuffling jig of the masquers, a step that was young when mankind was young and first celebrating the birth of spring. First the fancy clubs, whose captains wore capes worth a king's ransom—or a mortgage on a row house—with fifty pages to bear them. Then the Liberty Clowns and the other comics and lastly the ghostly, sweet string bands whose strains bring tears.

Johnny thought back to '44 when he had first seen them march, old men and young boys, because the proper "shooters" were away to war. And of something that should not be on Broad Street in Philadelphia on the first day of January, men riding in the parade, merciful Heaven forgive us, they could not walk.

He looked and saw that there were indeed automobiles in the line of march—wounded of the last war, and one G.A.R., hat square, hands folded over the head of his crane. Johnny held

his breath and waited. When each automobile approached the judges' stand, it stopped short of it, and everyone got out. Somehow, with each others help, they hobbled or crawled past the judging line, under their own power—and each club's pride was kept intact.

There followed another wonder—they did not get back into the automobiles, but marched on up Broad Street.

**T**HEN IT was Hollywood Boulevard, disguised as Santa Claus Lane, in a production more stupendous than movieland had ever attempted before. There were baby stars galore and presents and favors and candy for all the children and all the grown-up children, too. When, at last, Santa Claus's own float arrived, it was almost too large to be seen, a veritable iceberg, almost the North Pole itself, with John Barrymore and Mickey Mouse riding one on each side of Saint Nicholas.

And the elephants came.

Big elephants, little elephants, middle-sized elephants, from pint-sized. Wrinkles to mighty Jumbo...and with them bull men, Chester Conk-

lin, P. T. Barnum, Wallis Beery, Mowgli. "This," Johnny said to himself, "must be Mulberry Street."

There was a commotion on the other side of the column; one of the men was shooing something away. Then Johnny saw what it was—the dog. He whistled; the animal seemed confused, then it spat at him, scampered up, and jumped into Johnny's arms. "You stay with me," Johnny told him. "You might have gotten stepped on."

The dog licked his face. He had lost his clown suit, but the little peaked cap hung down under his neck. "What have you been up to?" asked Johnny. "And where is your mistress?"

The last of the elephants were approaching, three abreast, pulling a great carriage. A bugle sounded up front and the procession stopped. "Why are they stopping?" Johnny asked a neighbor.

"Wait a moment. You'll see."

The Grand Marshal of the march came trotting back down the line. He rode a black stallion and was himself brave in villain's boots, white pegged breeches, cutaway, and top hat. He glanced all around.

He stopped immediately in front of Johnny. Johnny held the dog more closely to him. The Grand Marshal dismounted and bowed. Johnny looked around to see who was behind him. The Marshal removed his tall silk hat and caught Johnny's eye. "You, sir, are the Man Who Travels in Elephants?" It was more a statement than a question.

"Uh? Yes."

"Greetings, Rex! Serene Majesty, your Queen and your court await you." The man turned slightly, as if to lead the way.

Johnny gulped and gathered Bindlestiff under one arm. The Marshall led him to the elephant-drawn carriage. The dog slipped out of his arms and bounded up into the carriage and into the lap of the lady. She patted it and looked proudly, happily, down at Johnny Watts. "Hello, Johnny! Welcome home, darling!"

"Martha!" he sobbed—and Rex stumbled and climbed into the carriage to embrace his queen.

The sweet voice of a bugle sounded up ahead, the parade started up again, wending its endless way—