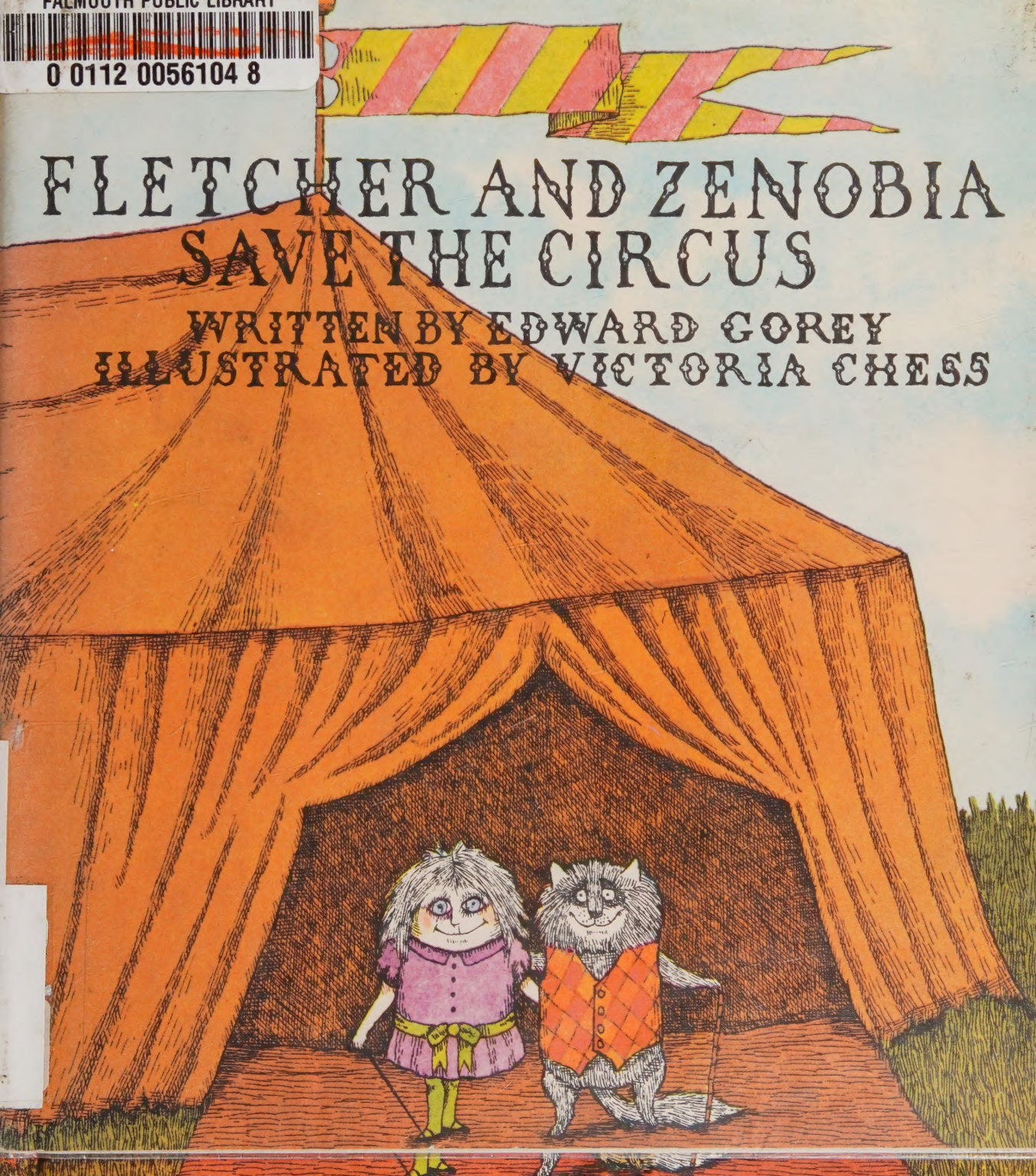


FLETCHER AND ZENOBIA SAVE THE CIRCUS

WRITTEN BY EDWARD GOREY
ILLUSTRATED BY VICTORIA CHES



WHEN the circus train comes to grief—without injury except for their trunk which happens to be aboard—Fletcher and Zenobia agree to help out. So with an encouraging toot from the steam calliope, Fletcher's rhinoceros head a little askew and Zenobia's pink spangles just a bit tight, they rush to the rescue in this delightful fable for all ages.



FLETCHER AND ZENOBIA
SAVE THE CIRCUS



VICTORIA CHESS AND EDWARD GOKEY
HAVE ALSO COLLABORATED ON

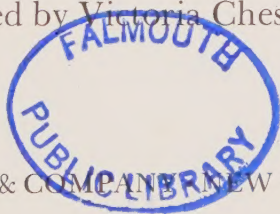
Fletcher and Zenobia

FLETCHER AND ZENOBIA SAVE THE CIRCUS



Written by *Edward Gorey*
~~Edward Gorey~~

Illustrated by Victoria Chess



DODD, MEAD & COMPANY NEW YORK

J. Adv. Pic.
Gorey

Text copyright © 1971 by Edward Gorey

Illustrations copyright © 1971 by Victoria Chess

All rights reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form
without permission in writing from the publisher

ISBN: 0-396-06415-9

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 70-173831

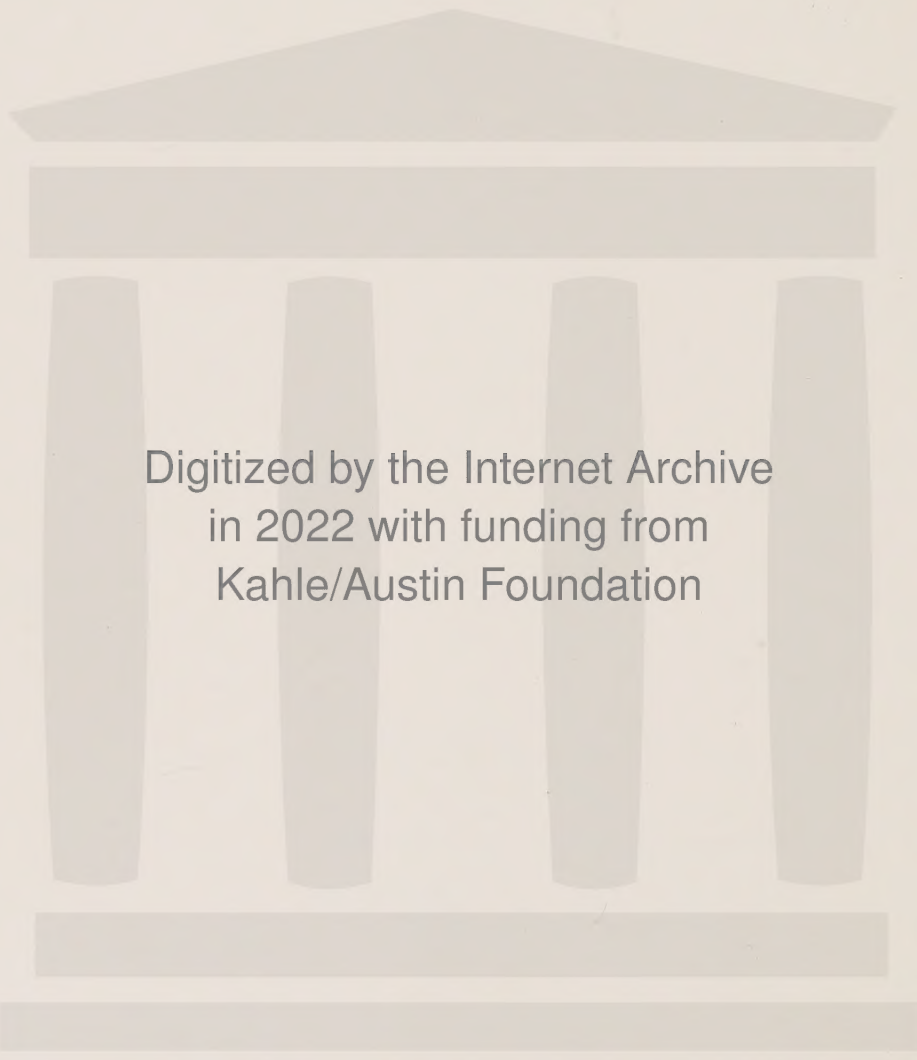
Printed in the United States of America

CHILDREN'S DEPARTMENT

Falmouth Public Library

Falmouth, MA 02540

To Sam



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

<https://archive.org/details/fletcherzenobias0000gore>

I

Several months afterwards Fletcher and Zenobia were sitting under the striped awning of the café across from the railway station of Remords-sous-Cloche and sipping lemon squashes while they waited for their trunk.



They had done the same thing yesterday and the day before that. Each afternoon the trunk was supposed to be on the 3:57 Down Train, which always arrived exactly at 4:08; but so far it never was.

“At least it isn’t raining,” said Fletcher.

“In fact,” said Zenobia, “the sun is out. It is shining on everything.”

“Not on us: we’re under the awning. What does it say?”

While Fletcher had been looking in shops for the right kind of toothpaste, Zenobia had been to the post office and found addressed to them (*poste restante*) a postcard from their friend, the moth.

“He’s just attended a splendid party on a dirigible cruising high above New York City,” said Zenobia. “*The food was delicious—what marrons glacés! what champagne!*” she read aloud.

“Is there a picture?” said Fletcher.

Zenobia turned over the card. It showed a brown and yellow streetcar going through some otherwise impenetrable dark-green woods. The red printing at the bottom said that it was the Main Street of Butte, North Dakota.

“It doesn’t seem likely,” said Zenobia. She handed the card to Fletcher.



“No indeed,” said Fletcher, who thought it should be South.

Zenobia made a noise with her straw.

“I wonder what happened,” said Fletcher, giving up on the postcard, “to the 3:41 Up Express?”

He made a louder one with his.

“It must have gone through; it always does at 3:41.”

“Shouldn’t we have noticed it? O . . .” Fletcher went on, starting to sing a still newish popular song:

“O if I could only choose,
I’d be a bit of primal ooze . . .”

“Plinky-plinky, plinky-plink; plinkety-plinkety”
—Zenobia pretended to play an invisible mandolin
—“plinky-plunkety-poo . . .”

After some more minutes of this desultory sort of thing, the hands of the station clock read almost 4:08, and the 3:57 Down Train appeared in a stately manner at the left of their field of vision.

The engine came to a stop behind the station building.



“The train looks several feet further off today,” said Zenobia.

“I don’t see how it could,” said Fletcher. “We sat at this same table yesterday and the day before.”

“I don’t either, but it does. It can’t be shrinking.”

“Do you suppose — ?” Fletcher was beginning, when he was interrupted by an ear-splitting whistle coming from the right.

With that, the 3:41 Up Express roared into view and its engine shot behind the station building.

At once there was a perfectly hideous crash in which no one was hurt.

Ends of disconnected cars appeared at angles above the station roof, clouds of steam billowed up in five or six places, flying objects, large and small, cluttered the air.

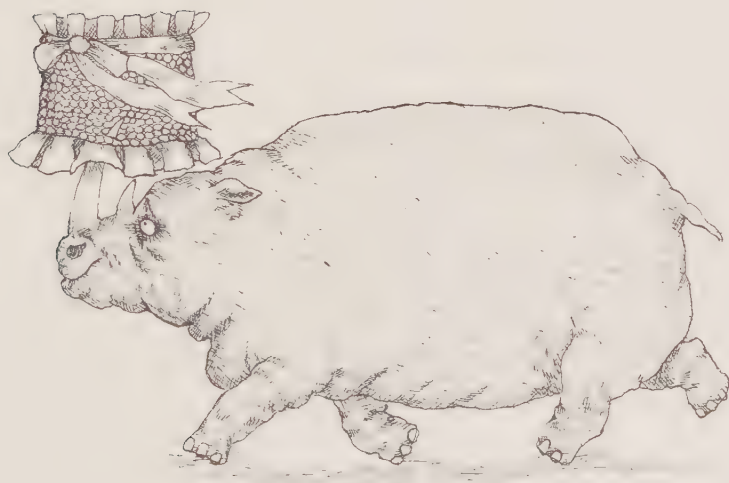




“It’s come,” said Fletcher, recognizing various hats. He meant their trunk.

“At last,” said Zenobia. “I thought I should never see my cerise ribbons again.” Just then one of them fluttered down from the heavens, narrowly missed falling into her glass, and landed in her lap.

In the meantime a rhinoceros with a huge beaded chiffon lampshade of a truly appalling vulgarity impaled on its horn lumbered into view at the right of the station, shook its head violently, sending the lampshade into a tree, and trundled off down the road; he was soon overtaken and passed by a beautiful white horse with glittering trappings and green and violet plumes on his head; a



lion and a tiger leaped into the shrubbery in the opposite direction as a large black touring-car filled with masked men wearing dusters careered to a stop by a dazed-looking lady wearing a dress trimmed with poultry feathers; two of the men leaned out and dragged her screaming into the back seat, and the car whirled away again in a cloud of dust, while a large gentleman, covered in orange and olive checked material and ornamented with various pins, chains, links, rings, and great black moustaches and whiskers, jumped up and down, waved his fists, and shouted incoherently after it; hats of all sorts and some papier-mâché animal heads—a rhinoceros, a white horse, a tiger, and a lion—fell from the sky. It was all very peculiar and exciting.



Without leaving his chair, Fletcher retrieved the nearest head—it happened to be the rhinoceros—with his foot.

“They’ll have to be pressed,” said Zenobia, winding it around three fingers.



“I suppose they must be ours, too,” said Fletcher. “They look faintly familiar.” He peered inside. “It says *Nice 1907*. I expect it was then. It is now, really.” He blew the dust from it. “Quite impressive.” He put it on. “Boo,” he said to Zenobia.

“Eeek,” said Zenobia absently. “I hope the catches on the trunk and the lock can be fixed.”

Fletcher shook his head, one inside the other; the effect was surprisingly lifelike. “How do you know they’re broken? I didn’t see it flying through the air, did you?” he said anxiously.

“No,” said Zenobia, “but they must be, or all our things couldn’t have been.”

“True,” said Fletcher, after a moment’s thought. “It’s terribly old, and I expect being in a train wreck at all probably hasn’t done it much good. Had we better go and see?” He removed the rhinoceros head.

“It all seems rather confused at present, and nobody seems to be doing anything about anything, so there’s no great rush,” said Zenobia with insouciance.

“Well, . . .” said Fletcher. The white horse’s head caught his eye. He went to pick it up.

“Let’s have another first,” said Zenobia, “to recruit our strength. Besides, the effect of all our hats strewn about has a certain charm.”

Fletcher in the horse’s head made a noise that was meant to be a high-spirited neigh.

“God bless you,” said Zenobia.

“Pardon?” said Fletcher vulgarly.

“You sneezed.”

“No I didn’t.”

“Oh.”

“Oh, yourself.”

Fletcher took off the horse’s head and put on the lion’s.

“Mew.”

Zenobia shrieked madly.

The checked gentleman, his whiskers disarranged and his moustaches awry, had collapsed at the table next to theirs, and for some time, when not mopping his face with a vast magenta bandana and taking large gulps of the local beer, been indulging in morose and incoherent mutterings.



Now his eye fell on Fletcher in the lion's head.

"Augustus," he cried, leaping to his feet. "You've come back."

"It's only me," said Fletcher, revealing himself.

"The final disappointment, the last irony." He burst into tears. "The absolute end."

"Is there something the matter?" said Zenobia,





who was quite drowsy from sipping lemon squashes and retrimming hats in her head.

“I am M. Zut-Alors.”

Fletcher and Zenobia look attentive but baffled.

“M. Zut-Alors,” he went on, “ of the Cirque Zut-Alors, Chut, et Morbleu. And you ask me what is the matter?”

“Of course,” said Fletcher. “We saw your posters; they’re beautiful. We’re planning to attend your Gala Opening Performance the day after tomorrow.”

“My entire circus gone, vanished in an instant. Thanks to that wretched railway: pouf!” He snapped his beringed fingers. “I shall probably have to sell them and wear dingy overalls and live on farina.”

“I have always adored circuses,” said Zenobia. “The sawdust in my veins was intended for the Cirque Medrano, but the reasons for its divergence and how it got to me are far too complicated to go into at the moment. . . .” She yawned.

“My menagerie escaped into the countryside; my stars, Mme Lespideza of the auburn tresses, the greatest equestrienne of her generation, and Mlle Pawlonia of the golden curls, the greatest tightrope-walker of the age, both abducted by international villains.”





“If you mean the men in the car,” said Zenobia more briskly, “they only took one lady, and her hair was definitely mousy.”

“Her name is actually Miss Violet. Wigs,” he explained. “It is the illusion that counts.”

“What about your partners?” said Fletcher. “Where are they?”

“M. Chut fell off a steamer in the North Sea many years ago, and M. Morbleu slipped off a glacier in Switzerland the following winter. I don’t know why I’m still alive.”

“They only got her, and not the wigs,” said Zenobia thoughtfully.

“My life has been downhill all the way,” said

M. Zut-Alors, looking at Fletcher. "Or uphill, if you look at it another way. Would you mind putting that lion's head on again?"

Zenobia had picked up the tiger's head and was looking inside. "Niece," she said.

"Whose?" said Fletcher mystified.

"I have an idea," Said M. Zut-Alors.

II

"I have a pain," said Fletcher.

It was two days later. He and Zenobia were standing behind a blue satin curtain, which would presently open.

On the other side of it, a calliope was playing a pot-pourri from *Le Prophète*, and coloured spot-lights were whirling around the tent. The whole town of Remords-sous-Cloche was there to see the Gala Opening Performance of the Cirque Zut-Alors, Chut, et Morbleu.

"Do you have a pain?" said Fletcher.

"I don't think so," said Zenobia. "It was much

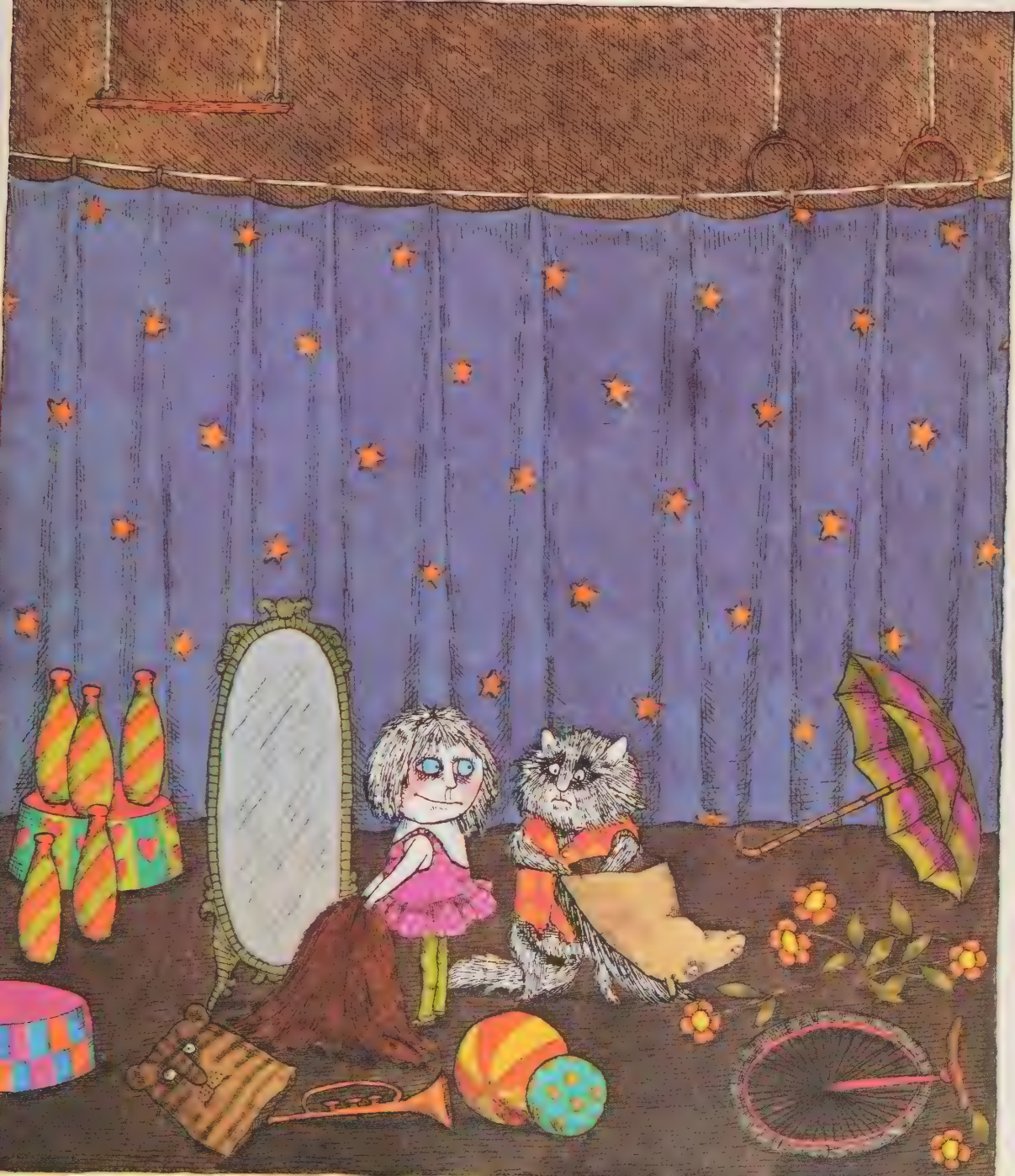
more *chic* to wear the pink spangles with the red wig, don't you agree? The green spangles would have made me look like a Christmas decoration. And they'll really be most elegant with the blond wig and the chalk-white makeup I've planned. . . ."

Fletcher moaned faintly.

"Where is it?" said Zenobia, all contrition.

"In my left thumb."

"Wiggle it briskly."



The calliope stopped abruptly, and a cheer went up as M. Zut-Alors as ringmaster stepped into the spotlight.

"No, it's my right knee."

"You mean it moves around? How strange!"

An expectant hush fell as the audience waited for M. Zut-Alors to tell them what the first attraction would be.

"No, I made a mistake the first time."

"Mesdames, . . ." cried M. Zut-Alors.

"Is it in my ears?"

"Messieurs, . . ."

"Or behind my nose?"

"Mes enfants, . . ."

"Oh dear, I don't know where it is, but I know I've got it."

"It is with unspeakable pleasure . . ."

"I expect it's just nerves," said Zenobia. "Are my seams straight? Once we're out there . . ."

Fletcher moaned again.

"I present to you Mme Lespidez, the flaming-haired equestrienne, and her snow-white steed, Britannicus . . ."

“It’s us,” cried Zenobia.

“It is?” said Fletcher.

She snatched the papier-mâché horse’s head from Fletcher’s nerveless grasp, and popped it firmly into place.



The next thing he knew, they were in the ring, the calliope was playing a hodgepodge from *Les Huguenots*, Zenobia was blowing kisses in all directions, and he was trying to remember to raise

his knees as high as possible as he pranced around the ring.

It seemed as if they had only been in the ring a minute or two when it was time for Fletcher to tear around the ring as fast as he possibly could while Zenobia did seventeen back somersaults without stopping; they exited at full speed through the blue satin curtain to wild applause.

The next item on the program, according to M. Zut-Alors, would be Toto the Clown and his Hair-Raising Pursuit by the Wild Rhinoceros, which would take place as soon as the calliope had played a medley from *Abimelek*.



While it did so, M. Zut-Alors put on his clown costume over his ringmaster's one, and a false nose over his own; Zenobia exchanged the pink span-
gles for the green, the red wig for the blond, and helped Fletcher, trying to catch his breath, out of





the horse and into the rhinoceros, who fortunately would not have to run so fast.

"I know I'm a fine figure of a cat," said Fletcher modestly, "but I wonder if I don't make a rather small rhinoceros?"

Zenobia looked at him with a critical eye, and then shrugged. "After all, these *are* the provinces; they can't reasonably expect . . ."

Fletcher looked downcast.

"Besides," Zenobia added quickly, "what you lack in quantity, as it were, you more than make up for—"

“Now!” cried M. Zut-Alors, and plunged through the curtain. A moment later, Fletcher lumbered after him, and the Great Pursuit was on.

Sometimes Fletcher almost caught up with his prey; at others, they were at opposite ends of the tent; every now and then the clown would find himself chasing the rhinoceros, or they would bump into each other and rush off in different directions.





At one point Fletcher saw from the corner of his eye a small boy tugging at his mother's sleeve.

"Mama, Mama, what kind of ugly animal is that?"

"It's a rhinoceros, dear. I believe it comes from Africa."

He reached that spot again a minute or two later.

"Well, it looks awfully small for a rhinoceros to me," said the small boy.

"Not for the provinces, dear. It would be larger if we were in Paris. . . ."

Again Fletcher went by that spot.

"I don't suppose we ever shall," the small boy's mother was saying. "If only your father were a bit more—"

M. Zut-Alors suddenly produced a telescoped crepe-paper palm tree from the depths of his costume, which he proceeded to open up and attempt to climb before the rhinoceros could reach him, but all in vain. This time the rhinoceros showed no interest in M. Zut-Alors whatever, but charged the tree instead, which instantly collapsed. The rhinoceros dragged it off, munching the fronds while M. Zut-Alors crept silently behind him.

The calliope struck up a *salmagundi* from *Le Camp de Silésie* and it was time for Mlle Pawlonia's tightrope act.

"Poor Miss Violet," said M. Zut-Alors, wriggling out of the clown costume. "Even if she is ever freed, it won't be any good. Those fiends will cut off one of her little toes and send it to me to prove they've got her, so she'll never be able to perform again."

"Nonsense," said Zenobia, making her makeup whiter still. "They always send a bit of an earlobe, and while this may make her the teeniest bit lop-sided, it can hardly affect her balance to any appreciable extent."

As soon as M. Zut-Alors had told everybody what was about to happen, Zenobia and Fletcher ran once again into the center of the ring. While Fletcher held the bottom to keep it steady, Zenobia swarmed nimbly up the rope ladder and took her place on the tiny platform high above. All white and gold and green, a spirit of the air, she drifted out on the wire. Back and forth she glided, her hands waving gently. She twirled once around and began to sing:

"No more to wonder about shoes,
Are they yours? Or are they whose? . . ."



Below, Fletcher, in a hooded blue cape with a white satin lining, strolled back and forth, getting his breath back, and playing a guitar: "Plinky-plinky, plinky-plink; plinkety-plinkety-plunkety,



plunkety-plink . . .”

Zenobia’s twirlings became more elaborate and breath-taking; she swooped, she glided.

“No more letters filled with news;
No more fantods, no more blues . . .”

“Plinky - plink, plunkety - plunk—” Fletcher tripped on the edge of his cape, but recovered himself with a great flourish. “Plinkety-plinkety, poo, poo, poo . . .”

Sweeping backwards with dazzling speed to the platform, Zenobia snatched up armfuls of paper flowers—they came from the trunk which had been hardly damaged at all and easily mended—and flung them on the audience below.

“No more taxes, no more dues;
No more drains, and no more flues . . .”

When she came to the final chorus, she sang it standing on her head and twinkling her toes in an upside-down *entrechat dix*.

While Zenobia was taking bow after bow, Fletcher was getting into his lion costume.

M. Zut-Alors made his speech, the calliope played a ragout from *Robert le Diable*, and Fletcher, roaring with blood-curdling ferocity, bounded into the cage with M. Zut-Alors snapping his whip at a safe distance behind. Fletcher hardly saw much point in all the leaping from tub to tub, through hoops, and so forth, but he had a marvelous time clawing the air and snarling and generally carrying on.





At the climax of the act, as M. Zut-Alors pretended to pry open the lion's mouth, the hinge gave way, so that when M. Zut-Alors put his own head inside, the jaws snapped shut, there was a curious muffled double shriek of surprise, the lion's head bobbed madly for a moment, and then that of M. Zut-Alors emerged none the worse for wear, to the enraptured cries of the audience.

At last it was time for the finale of the performance. Fletcher and Zenobia had worked it out in secret, and had told M. Zut-Alors nothing about what they planned to do.

The calliope struck up an olla podrida from *L'Étoile du Nord*, M. Zut-Alors, without knowing anything more about it, announced that for the Grand Finale of the Gala Opening Performance of the Cirque Zut-Alors, Chut, and Morbleu, would be presented for the first time anywhere in the world, La Cryptomeria et le Tigre Volant.

“Wait!” cried M. Zut-Alors, handing Fletcher the tiger’s head as they were about to go through the curtain. “You’re forgetting it.”

“I shan’t need *that*,” said Fletcher with immense dignity.



Once more Zenobia climbed the rope ladder, this time followed by Fletcher in a fetching costume. And then began their trapeze act . . . it was indescribable. Never had the Cirque Zut-Alors, Chut, et Morbleu had such a fabulous success.

III

Once again Fletcher and Zenobia were sitting under the striped awning of the café opposite the railway station of Remords-sous-Cloche and sipping lemon squashes while they waited for the 3:57 Down Train to come in. This time their trunk, sitting in full view on the station platform, was going back on it, and so were they.

A week had passed since the recent railway disaster, and all signs of it had been removed, except for the lampshade, which was still in the tree, weathering unbecomingly.





“Do we have time for another?” said Fletcher.
“I feel quite done up.”

“Yes, let’s,” said Zenobia. “Me, too. I don’t suppose it will arrive until 4:08 as always.”

“Our trapeze act really was a fabulous success, wasn’t it?” said Fletcher.

“Yes, indeedy,” said Zenobia. “I expect we could do it before the crowned heads of Europe anytime we wanted to. M. Zut-Alors seemed to think so. I wonder if we should have agreed to join him.”

"I'm glad we decided not to," said Fletcher, stretching furiously. "I'm stiff all over."

"So am I," said Zenobia. "But is it any wonder? After all, between us we saved an entire circus. Still, I guess once in a way is really quite enough...."

Fletcher blew some bubbles into his glass.

"What do you think of Miss Violet?" said Zenobia in an offhand manner.

"Perhaps I was expecting too much after all the



worrying M. Zut-Alors went through, but her performances didn't seem to have the go yours did. No real dash somehow."

Zenobia dipped the end of her little finger into hers and pressed it to the tip of her nose. "Um," was all she said.

"And then even after you'd convinced her how much better her costumes and wigs were your way, I fear she still looked a bit of a frump."

"Poor thing, of course she'd been through a terrible ordeal and cried an awful lot. I expect she's usually much more radiant, well, some any-way. . . ."

"The tiger was awfully big, wasn't he?" said Fletcher wistfully.

"Was he?" said Zenobia. "I suppose he was, but I for one found him a terrible disappointment. So pallid somehow."





“Oh?” said Fletcher.

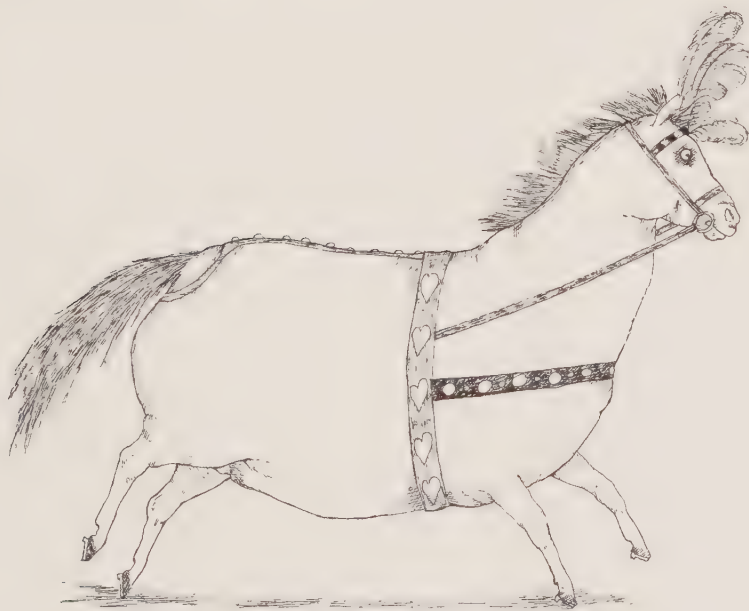
“Lacking in personality. Now you, on the other hand, were much more truly tiger-like, a sort of ferociously concentrated essence of tigerishness, if you see what I mean.”

Fletcher did. He beamed.

“But how did all the animals get back?” said Zenobia. “Miss Violet went into hysterics the moment she turned up and I had to sit with her for hours until she calmed down and I never did hear

where they'd all gone or what happened or anything."

"Well," said Fletcher, "let me think. Georges, the white horse, was discovered pulling a milk wagon through the countryside. He had all his trapping and plumes on, and the owner of the milk wagon had been inspired to repaint his wagon green and purple to go with them; he'd renamed



Georges Mazeppa, and was now charging two francs more for a quart of milk."

"How mysterious," said Zenobia.

"Then someone saw the lion about noon. He was taking a nap on the balustrade on the roof of the municipal building, though no one apparently saw him go up the stairs."

"I expect everyone was too busy hitting documents with rubber stamps and putting them in the wrong folders," said Zenobia.

"Then when the local Turkish bath was opened in the afternoon, the first customers came across the tiger happily swimming up and down in the pool."

"That must have been disconcerting," said Zenobia.



“Later in the afternoon, a small boy on a bicycle was sent into a screaming fit when he ran into the rhinoceros meditating at a crossroad, but then the rhinoceros wandered off and turned up again at the punchbowl on the terrace of the Duc de Croissant during his annual garden party. He’d drunk most of the contents.”

“I’m glad nothing worse happened. From M. Zut-Alor’s ravings, I expected there’d be a pile of mangled corpses and heaven knows what else.”





“But how did Miss Violet escape from her kidnappers? She certainly doesn’t look particularly intrepid.”

“She didn’t,” said Zenobia. “They released her unharmed after her Floating Islands had sunk without trace and it was realized she could not possibly be the cook who had been unscrupulously lured to the South of France by a false telegram

informing her of the last illness of a beloved relative."

"I expect M. Zut-Alors will find something else to be upset about as soon as the circus has settled down again," said Fletcher. He began to sing.

"All is lost, no more to lose;
Life would be a cozy snooze . . ."

"Plinky-plinky, plunkety-plink-plink, plinkety-plunkety—" Zenobia stopped strumming her imaginary mandolin. "Heavens, what is that?"

A train was sitting in the station.

"A train," said Fletcher, "But it can't be ours. It's only 3:57."

"It must be," said Zenobia. "There isn't any other."



"I don't see why the 3:57 should start coming at 3:57 instead of 4:08 just because it was involved in an accident last week," said Fletcher. "After all, it isn't as if—"

"Perhaps we should go and get on it, as long as it is here," said Zenobia. "*And* they've just put our trunk on it."

"You're perfectly right," said Fletcher. "It never stopped for very long, being always late, though it isn't now, but possibly it would be safer anyway if we—"





“Wherefore, On!” cried Zenobia, appositely quoting her favourite author, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

They gulped the last of their lemon squashes, dashed across to the station, leapt onto the train, just as it was starting up in a stately manner, and once more they were off to Somewhere Else.

Gorey
Fletcher and Zenobia
save the circus 9.95

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE CARD FROM POCKET

By returning material on date due, you will help
save the cost of postage.

We hope you enjoy the library. Come again and
bring your friends!

FALMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARY

Falmouth, Mass. 02540

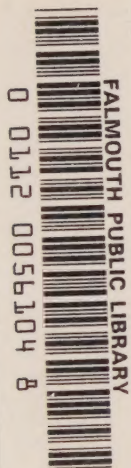
548-0280

FALMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARY
www.falmouthpubliclibrary.org

FALMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARY
www.falmouthpubliclibrary.org

FALMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARY
www.falmouthpubliclibrary.org

FALMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARY
www.falmouthpubliclibrary.org



Edward Gorey is the familiar author and illustrator of more than thirty small books.

Victoria Chess, a popular artist, presides over her modest menagerie in New York City.

DODD, MEAD & COMPANY



0-396-06
415-9
ISBN