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All characters in this publication bar three are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

King Edward VII reigned as King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions and Emperor of India from 1901 to 1910.

Professor Conwy Lloyd Morgan lived from 1852 to 1936.  
He owned a dog called Tony.

He authored the Introduction to Comparative Psychology,  
first published in 1894 and revised nine years later.

The work is now known almost exclusively for thirty-six famous words.

Discussing problems in the interpretation of animal behaviour,

Morgan wrote that:

“In no case may we interpret an action as the outcome of the exercise of a higher psychical faculty, if it can be interpreted as the outcome of one which stands lower in the psychological scale.”

This principle became widely known as Morgan’s Canon.

Inspired by this principle,  
Lord Morgan’s Cannon is however a work of fiction.  
All representations of Professor Conwy Lloyd Morgan, his terrier and  
King Edward VII are fictitious.

## The Morning Rehearsal

The old leopard knew what to do. He tightened his cheeks, revealed his teeth and made his whiskers bristle. He did it again, this time forcing a guttural roar up and out from his flaccid belly, flaring his nostrils. Then, to unsettle those watching, he raised an arthritic blotched paw, and pulled at the shiny new metal collar around his neck. It snagged on his ear, as it should. So he pushed up from his haunches and made the effort to leap down from the red and white stool.

The chain linking his collar to the stool tugged at his neck, swinging his body in an arc. A whip cracked across his black nose, forcing a sharp wind up his nostrils and across his tongue. He tasted hot leather and wretched. He pawed at the collar again, dislodged the false bolt, and off it came.

He was free.

The old leopard roared with purpose this time, baring a cracked pair of canines that still impressed the good seats in row E. He moved quickly across the sawdust, reaching the ring's edge, and began to pace, occasionally lifting his head to glimpse seat 28.

Canvass bellowed high above his head. Adrenaline began to course through his veins, a drop of saliva falling from his black gums. He lashed a dark tongue across his lips and imagined Lord Morgan's thighs. They would be juicy thighs, he knew. Everyone who sat in seat 28 had rich, fat thighs, swollen within thin trousers. He was not too old to remember the taste of living flesh, twitching and bloody. He wanted one final warm meal.

He quickened his pace, practising for the evening. It would be his most difficult challenge: how to stalk a prey that had paid to see his every move. How to move faster than the whip, and how to leap the children that would inevitably sit in his way, waving

pink candyflosses, obscuring his view of his target.

If he rehearsed properly, and planned it right, he would make it, and later tonight, Lord Morgan would be his. He would leap from the posters advertising this tawdry circus and on to Lord Morgan's thighs, landing in people's dreams, their nightmares. He would make the London papers, and everyone would know his name. It would be his last show, his greatest show, one for the ages. Even the elephant would respect him, once he was done.

The whip cracked again, flicking across his tail. His hips immediately collapsed, an involuntary hiss escaping his jaws. He coiled his creaking back, his tongue licking blood off his rear. The lashing angered him more than the thousand before. This was his final rehearsal, and they weren't giving him the stage. He hadn't finished his planning. He wasn't ready to be put back in his cage.

Suddenly he felt a new pain, as a long wooden fork pinned his neck to the floor. The more he hissed the harder the Ring Master pushed, a strut grating against each jugular. He hated the fork more than the whip. He snarled, breathing dirt as a rusting collar was thrown over his head, and tightened. He tried to kick it off again, but he knew instantly this was his proper collar, with a functioning bolt, the one he'd worn since arriving in a crate all those years ago. He spun on to his back, hissing and spitting, bringing up four legs, absent claws pawing at the air.

"Get the net on him," the Ring Master bellowed.

The black mesh descended and the circus boys tied him in a writhing ball. The Ring Master sneered as they dragged his old feline bones across the floor of the ring, the sawdust and dirt rubbing out his spots.

He could see the Ring Master no more. But he heard him.

"That old cat is so stupid. I want a panther, a black panther. Something exotic. Get me a panther, I don't care how much they cost. Something to scare the kids."

He stopped fighting the net, and relaxed. Leopards are cunning,

he reminded himself, and old leopards are very cunning indeed.

He would play nicely for the rest of the day. He'd eat the chicken they gave him on show days, to sate his belly and appetite for spectators. He'd lick his coat and present himself properly. He'd walk his cage, biding his time and when the circus boys checked on him at dusk, he'd hiss and roar and he would look the part.

They couldn't do tonight's show without him. He'd get one more chance. They would swap his collar for the one that doesn't work. He would throw it off as he did every evening, in every performance from Brighton to Bristol. He'd hear the gasps, then watch as the paying spectators tucked back into their sweets, stuffing their faces as the Ring Master pretended the old leopard was on the loose.

But this time he would prowl for real. He would beat the whip. And as he bounded from the ring and over the stalls he would scare the wits out of the parents, and particularly their kids, as his whiskers brushed their little heads.

He would pounce on seat 28, in row E. He would kill this Lord Morgan, and savour his flesh. He would taste warm blood one last time, before the bullet struck between his eyes.

He would ruin the Ring Master, this Big Top and all in it. He would show them he wasn't a stupid circus animal. He would show them he was a leopard.

“You silly old cat.”

Doris the elephant plodded into the ring, just as the old leopard left on his back. The red hat on her head matched the colour of the Ring Master's coat and cheeks, while her eyes twinkled with the sequins on her shawled, arched back. She had a habit of agreeing with the Ring Master's words.

“They'll replace you with a panther, and then where will you be?” she rhetorically asked, one eye looking back.

She calmed her nose and made straight for the buckets, which

she picked up one by one, emptying cold water over her shoulders. She waited until a clown ran past, and emptied the last bucket on his head, swamping his red curly wig, making his eyes weep some more. The clown feigned shock and ran to her belly, thumping it. In a well-practised manoeuvre, she pivoted and scooped the man off his feet as he fretted and pulled at the trunk wrapping his waist. She held him aloft for seven seconds, enough time for any audience to laugh and joke, before she returned him to the ground. She bent one knee, tipping her huge head and smaller hat, imagining the applause, and waited for the Ring Master to announce her next trick.

She loved to follow his commands. She didn't mind when he called her dopey, or dumb. She knew that when he starved her of carrots, it was for the best. She liked his red coat, chubby cheeks, moustache and beard, which intrigued her. She remembered him as a young man, and how he'd once been kind and gentle, sleeping in the hay lining her wagon. She had felt him grow strong for a human, and then watched him grow fat as the circus toured bigger venues and the money rolled in. She had tolerated his use of the harpoon and the tears it made in her ears, and accepted it graciously when he decided her teeth should be filed, just in case.

He was her leader and he led her across the countryside. He found water and graze. He even fed the old leopard. And when they were in the ring together, under that Big Top that was as old as she, Doris felt surrounded by family.

Between her tricks, when she sat upon her own giant reinforced stool, her front legs resting upon her massive knees, she would let her aging lungs sigh in satisfaction as she recalled the casts of years gone by. The three lions that used to laugh at the leopard. The seal and his slapstick humour. The prancing white horses she secretly envied, and the monkey's mother, with whom she had been such good friends. The lazy anaconda that wouldn't even coil around the Ring Master's neck. The European badger that lasted a season,

because every paying customer claimed to have seen one before. She even remembered the tropical butterflies that came and went before anyone could give them a name.

Most of her old circus friends had died or been sold. But without the Ring Master, none would have had a job, and what sort of life was that? So she was pleased to follow him, to be part of his herd.

“He’s the only one clever enough to keep the show on the road,” she said out loud, in a soft, deep voice, as the Ring Master pirouetted before her, tipping his hat to the vacant benches.

“Who’s a clever boy? Who’s a clever boy?”

“Who’s a clever boy? Who’s a clever boy?”

The voice, a perky squawk, came from above Doris. The elephant looked up to the ropes holding straight the centre pole of the tent. Her eyes were no good over longer distances, but she could make out a blue flash, as Bessie, the resident budgie, took to the air.

“Who’s a clever boy? Who’s a clever boy?”

Bessie buzzed the top of the tent, alighting on a long strand of bunting. She was an English budgie, larger and more impressive than American budgies that had become popular in London. She was a blue bird, thought more interesting than the green varieties, and she had spangled plumage, bearing a proud azure chest and white wings. She was a rarity, she kept telling her friends, and she was the main act, her aerial acrobatics the highlight of every performance.

The only trouble with Bessie, however, was that no one, apart from Doris, the anteater, the monkey and the old leopard, noticed that she was alive. She was too small to be seen at a distance, and she flew too high for the audience to register her spins and loops. She talked constantly, chattering and squawking, advertising herself as the most exotic parrot in all Europe. But the Ring Master and circus boys had long since forgotten her. They had stopped giving her seed, having converted her cage to house the most interesting rats caught

under the wagons. She fed from the fields and slept in Doris's dorm, and each day during every rehearsal and evening show she entered the Big Top and gave it her all. But she took not one penny at the gates and received not a moment's applause. Bessie could have been a common sparrow for all it mattered to anyone but her.

"And now, ladies and the gentleman," shouted the Ring Master as he twirled upon the heels of his shiny leather boots. "The last act of the evening! A creature you wouldn't dare to presume exists! A wild man captured deep in the heart of the jungle!"

He took stock, catching his breath and giving his pretend audience time to catch theirs.

"A wild man I tell you! A wild man with a body covered in fur! A wild man, covered in fur, who will terrorise this circus, and everyone in it! I give you, the wild man of the Amazon!"

The Ring Master threw open his arms, inviting the beast to appear through the fading white curtains to the side of the ring, the same veil through which the old leopard has just passed.

The curtains twitched without parting. The Ring Master stood, eyes wide open, mouth agape. The curtains moved again, a tiny arm reaching through, searching for something to grab. The Ring Master bucked his shoulders, throwing his hat and whip to the sky. A tiny black, brown and white pin monkey parted the material and tottered into view wearing his own very small red hat and miniature red waistcoat.

Doris chuckled, as she did each time they rehearsed this moment. She knew how, during a performance, the appearance of this tiny monkey punctured the giant tent, deflating the tension within, drawing outrageous laughs from the audience.

Edward the pin monkey walked forwards and took off his bowler. He held both arms in the air, mimicking the Ring Master, and tottered into the ring, using his tail to balance his unsteady hips.

“A wild man covered in fur! A wild man of diminutive proportions! Have you ever seen such a thing?”

The Ring Master was on a roll.

“Hold on to your bags, ladies and gentleman. Hold on to your hats and your money, for this is a wild man of terror!”

He paused long enough to imagine the audience laughing again. Then, with a flick of his wrist, he cracked his whip. The air inside the tent split, making Doris’s knees twitch.

In a flash Edward collapsed on to all fours, running across the dust. He was up over the cheap seats, with the limited view reserved for the poorest children. He bound left and right, arms outstretched, grimacing and shrieking, his sharp white teeth glinting in the gloom. He practised his movements, dipping his hands into purses, feeling for pennies and hoping for a sovereign or posh watch. He scampered back down to the ring and climbed on to the shoulder of the Ring Master, who gave him a grape to distract the punters, as Edward pretended to drop his loot into his keeper’s pockets. He then returned to the stands, to once more rehearse terrorising and secretly robbing his imaginary audience.

Bessie flew down from on high, dive-bombing the seats, in her mind adding to the commotion, while Doris raised her bulk off her stool and trumpeted so loudly that she hurt her lips. She loved this part of the show more than any other. The grand finale! The wet clown drenched the dry clowns, and Doris pretended to drench the crowd. The giant anteater returned, running circles around the ring, his head bobbing up and down, struggling to keep his spectacles upon his long nose.

During the real show, Edward would now make a mockery of those in the audience who had mocked his entrance, and if he wasn’t tied up in a black net, the old leopard would get to loosen his muscles, running further and for longer than he would at any other time of the day.



“Enough!” screamed the Ring Master. “Enough!”

Doris bowed her head and the clowns stopped smiling. Edward returned to the Ring Master’s shoulder seeking another grape, while Bessie alighted upon Doris’s head, not that anyone noticed. Another good rehearsal, Doris thought.

The anteater, however, kept on running. His massive claws on his front paws kept digging into the sawdust as he trotted as fast as he could around the outside of the ring, his black and white hair brushing the barrier the poorest children struggled to see over.

He trotted so fast his spectacles started to steam. He didn’t see the Ring Master traverse the ring, or the whip coming until it flicked across his long snout. The force of the blow was too much: those huge, powerful front legs, so good at digging, buckled beneath him. He turned his snout to stop it gouging a line in the dust, and fell to the ground, his back legs tumbling over his chest. He came to rest staring down his nose, at a pink cut opening next to three thin wispy scars that crossed his face.

“No! No! No! No!” the Ring Master screamed at everyone in the tent. “Why doesn’t this stupid animal learn? If he runs next to the barrier, they can’t see him!”

He whipped the anteater again, almost for pleasure, and commanded all to leave. Even Edward clambered down his arm and on to the floor, running to Doris for safety. The elephant let the young monkey run up her trunk and sit next to Bessie on her head, while all three looked sadly at the anteater, writhing in agony.

As Doris turned to leave the ring, she heard the Ring Master muttering to his second, a man called Jim, the strongest man in the circus who still earned his way lifting small women over his head.

“Today of all bloody days,” growled the Ring Master. “If we don’t get it right tonight, we’re finished! We’ll be bankrupt! No jobs, nothing. The wagons will have to go, and the animals sold to the knackers for dog meat.”

## Before The Show

The late afternoons were normally a special time at Whyte and Wingate's Big Top. The sun always began its gentle, inevitable decline. As the fields cooled and shadows lengthened, sleeps were taken and lethargic legs stretched. The seeds of dandelions would breeze on by, buttercups glowing among the clover.

Chores and rehearsals done, Jim the Strongman liked to oil his moustache, hoping the clairvoyant lady would offer to wash his shirt, clean as it was already. The circus boys would practice their chosen art; juggling knives or checking the knots on the ropes of the trapeze they hoped to one day master. The hire-wire girls would flirt and giggle, always living for today, but never doing enough to catch the eye of the Ring Master, who would sit in the open, on a folding chair, with a whisky and his cane, counting the advance tickets for each evening's performance, calculating just how extravagant it would have to be to turn a profit.

The animals were housed together, their wagons in a circle, ready to be unleashed and walked down the grassy stretch and in through the curtains of the big tent.

That day, Doris stood outside the anteater's cage, her right front foot chained to a willow tree that somehow grew away from water. Being a good, loyal elephant, who had never yet hurt a clown, she was allowed a ten-metre chain. The circus boys figured she was experienced enough not to circle the tree, and they even put down two bales of hay for her to toss and taste if she got bored of the cocksfoot and common bent grasses under her wide, grey feet.

The mosquitoes were too small to bother her, and she ignored the crows that occasionally landed, trying to peck at her back. She stood as she often did that English spring, gently swaying, as she explored the vertical bars of the cage. Being an Indian elephant,

she had two lips on her trunk and she used both to probe the bars and the gaps between, seeing if there was room to squeeze through and touch the anteater, who appeared to be either dead, or sleeping, a motionless ball of spiky black and white lying still on tar-covered planks.

She searched and snaffled, sometimes blowing on to her friend's body before returning to her hay, and swaying again, occasionally considering whether to place her head against the cage, and lean in, tipping it off its trailer. But she had seen it all before. So as the sun descended, she took to kicking up a dirt pile, and flicking a little over her back.

Doris didn't notice Bessie flying into the anteater's cage, alighting silently next to his weeping nose. Nor did she see Bessie bob down, her tiny tongue dipping into a tear the anteater had silently shed, tasting it for salt. The anteater stirred, slowly opening his sorrowful eyes, and he dragged a paw across the cage, his claws etching another four lines into its timber. He pulled himself to his senses, and spoke, quietly, seriously, but without substance.

"I can't go on," he said.

The anteater was only seven years old, young for his kind, even among those kept in circuses. His neck was thickening beyond his head, his tail growing bushy and long, yet he hadn't developed an eye for the best ant hills. Like many captive anteaters, his spectacles were strapped to his tiny ears for show. But he was already exhausted, whipped into submission.

Bessie hopped upon his head, and danced along it, avoiding his wounds. She hoped to warm his blood, reviving some mammalian instinct, encouraging him into the last light penetrating the bars before dusk. She asked him to look out across the meadow and imagine wandering across it, like he had once plodded the evening plains of South America, before being trapped, bagged, sold and shipped.

“You have to get yourself better,” she chirped. “Better and better and better. You have to get yourself better.”

She cocked her head as she told him this, and tickled her feathers.

“But I can’t go on,” the anteater said slowly. “Anyway, they don’t even like me.”

“You have to get yourself better. And you have to make them like you,” said Bessie, picking away at him. “It’s the only way to survive in this business. The only way to survive.”

She jumped along his back, treading her tiny feet into his hair, trying to massage his exotic haystack of a torso.

“It’s the only way to survive.”

The anteater sighed. He stuck out his tongue, curling it right back on itself until it reached his eyes. He licked at them, discovering his spectacles sat off their perch, dangling awkwardly. He realised how easily he could crush his glasses, if only he could summon the energy to roll over.

“They don’t like me. And in all this time, they haven’t even given me a name.”

For Bessie, this was a hard point to argue. She thought she knew the circus business better than any, being the star of every show. She often perched behind the Ring Master’s chair, and would listen to him and the humans discuss how to best entertain the masses. She knew what the audience wanted, what the Big Top needed, and how to put in a performance. She also knew that every star act had a name. And the anteater had no name.

“Then we shall name you,” she declared. “We shall name you Bear.”

Bessie seemed excited by her plan. None of the animals had bothered to name the anteater during the seasons past.

But she didn’t consider how to get the anteater’s new name

up in lights, or on all the posters. Perhaps she thought the anteater might take inspiration from a moniker, act appropriately, and the circus boys would notice. They would etch his habits upon a wooden sign, and hang it above his cage. Though quite how the young anteater might act like a bear went unresolved. Bessie also failed to think through how the audience might react on seeing a seven-year-old anteater, when they might be reasonably be expecting a seven-foot ursine. Perhaps that is why the anteater took the name Bear, but no human ever knew him as such.

The anteater considered his new name, then decided he liked it. He was partial to honey after all. And if he was called Bear, the old leopard would finally have to listen to him, big beast to big beast.

“I shall be called Bear,” he said.

With that, he raised his whipped body, much like a bear might first stand after the sleepy season had ended.

“He is Bear, he is Bear,” agreed Bessie.

Doris flapped her ears at the sudden noise, swinging her shoulders to face the anteater’s cage. She blew a matriarch’s trumpet.

“Will you perform in tonight’s show?” asked Doris, expectantly.

“It’s the only way to survive. It’s the only way to survive,” agreed Bessie.

The anteater straightened the spectacles upon his thinning head, using a single claw to draw the band around his ears. He looked a little like the crazy pilot of the steam-powered airship that had briefly drifted high over the show in Farnborough, doubling the takings.

“Yes I suppose so,” he answered quietly. “But what if they whip me again?”

“Oh I don’t think that’s likely,” said Doris. “Tonight is going to be a special performance. All the circus boys are talking about it,” she said.

“Why so special?” asked Bessie.

She started preening her most blue feathers, chattering her beak

along their length, getting all excited.

“Why?” roared Doris. “Why?”

She pulled away from the anteater’s cage, and pirouetted as only a trained elephant can, spinning her whole body around a single back leg. She stepped out of her chain, settled and leaned into the bars, her two short tusches splitting them.

“Tonight is special, because the great Lord Morgan is coming to see us all,” she announced proudly.

“Lord Morgan is coming! Lord Morgan is coming!” squealed Bessie.

She flew out of the cage, and round and round in the darkening sky, oblivious to any watching merlins hidden in the trees at the meadow’s edge.

The antics of the elephant and the bird started to draw a crowd. A murmuration of starlings flew past, convulsing itself, unsure whether to stay or go. Edward the pin monkey danced across the field, up Doris’s tail and on to her back. Even a common hedgehog dozing under the wagon awoke and unfurled himself to listen.

Together the performing animals of Whyte and Wingate’s Big Top circus began to piece together all they knew.

Lord Morgan was a most noble man, the foremost animal expert in all the world, said Edward. Being a monkey, Edward considered himself the most knowledgeable of all the animals. He was a little hard of hearing, having sat next to too many organs as they were turned for a few pennies. But he knew how to count, and could remember all the fruits better than any of his keepers, having a particular penchant for passion fruits and kiwis, treats some of the more stupid circus boys struggled to tell apart. Some said the white-faced capuchins of the French circuses were more clever, but Edward considered himself, a tufted capuchin, to be above even them, especially because he was learning to juggle fire.

“He’s a big, hairy man,” said Edward. “The hair on his chin reaches down to his knees.”

“No it doesn’t,” said Doris. “He looks like a nice man, with a long, carefully trimmed beard. I’ve seen many a beard, on many an ape, and Lord Morgan has style.”

“He keeps his money in his watch pocket,” added Edward.

“How do you know all this?” asked the anteater. “Have you ever seen him?”

Doris demurred.

“Lord Morgan has a beard. Lord Morgan has a beard. He is the cleverest man in the world,” said Bessie, flapping her wings.

“Well? How do you know this?” asked the newly anointed Bear.

Edward started one of his tales, describing how the Ring Master had invited Lord Morgan to dinner a few evenings before, the moment the Big Top had arrived in the fields surrounding the old slave city of Bristol. Edward has supped red wine, with the Ring Master, while Lord Morgan preferred white, said the monkey. They had eaten quail shot on the Mendip moors and chewed tobacco to end proceedings, as the men discussed politics.

“No such thing!” declared Doris. “You didn’t have a place at the dinner. You were sitting on the Ring Master’s shoulder. Doing what you were told.”

Edward ignored her. He told the elephant, the budgie, the anteater named after a bear, the hedgehog and any passing birds how Lord Morgan had indeed come to visit the Ring Master.

It was a Tuesday night, the day usually reserved for cards. But on this night, the Ring Master had told Jim the Strongman, the clairvoyant woman, clowns and all the performing boys and girls to stay in their trailers. The Ring Master had prepared his own wagon, unpacked the silver cutlery, and sat down to eat with Lord Morgan of University College, Bristol.

This bearded man was a professor of all the animals, said Edward, reciting what he had heard that night. He was a scientist,

Lord Morgan had told the Ring Master over dinner, and he was particularly interested in whether certain animals had extraordinary abilities. He wanted to discover exactly what tricks animals could learn, and how they did so. He had made some observations of kittens and cats, and of his own pet dog, but he had yet to see how a more exotic animal might perform when posed certain challenges. So this Lord Morgan had made the Ring Master a proposal.

He wanted to visit Whyte and Wingate's Big Top, and he wanted to be given the best seat in the house. He wanted the Ring Master to arrange the most amazing, the most intricate, the most daredevil show he could, and he wanted to sit and observe it all from row E. He would watch each animal with great interest, especially the leopard he had passed on his way to the Ring Master's wagon. He would take notes, and give them marks for intellect and artistry. He would pay particular attention to the instructions of the Ring Master, and how each animal responded to the directions they were given.

The Ring Master, said Edward, had been gripped by Lord Morgan's speech. He had twirled his own thin and waxed beard and attempted to use bigger words in his own conversation. As if to prove a point, the Ring Master asked Edward to pour Lord Morgan another glass of wine, which Edward of course did. Then he asked this professor of all animals what was in it for Whyte and Wingate's Big Top?

This confused Lord Morgan, reported Edward. So the Ring Master took a direct approach, wondering out loud how much Lord Morgan would pay to see such a performance?

Lord Morgan chortled, said Edward. Scientists didn't pay to study animals, even those in a circus, he told the Ring Master. But he was sure the two men could come to some accommodation. For example, he might be able to write up his findings and share them with people he knew across Europe and America. Even experts in



Russia might read his report, he suggested. And that would put Whyte and Wingate's Big Top on a map of the globe.

The Ring Master shrugged, playing cards after all. So Lord Morgan upped his offer. He was writing a very big book on animals, he said, a very important book that could turn Whyte and Wingate's exotic creatures into global celebrities.

If the Ring Master could put on a show, and let him study it, Lord Morgan could, in return, make the Ring Master's circus famous.

"That's why tonight is so important," tweeted Bessie. "Oh it's going to be such fun. I'll do a twirl and fade, and sing one of my favourite songs."

"I'm going to try a new routine with the clowns," announced Doris.

"Well I'll get better marks than you all," said Edward, gesticulating frantically. "I'm going to juggle two fire sticks at once. That's one more than any monkey has ever juggled. Ever! In all of history!"

"So that's why the Ring Master got angry with the whip," shrugged Bear, though no one listened.

Edward hadn't finished. Like all clever monkeys, he knew how to tell a good story, and how to save the best of it till last.

"There's even more at stake," he announced.

Instead of continuing, he sat back upon Doris's shoulders, suddenly uninterested. He placed a small hand inside his waistcoat pocket and pulled out a single peanut. He cracked its shell, and shoved it into his face, bits of nut falling about Doris's neck. Even the hedgehog, who hadn't seen a monkey before, couldn't tell if he was doing it for show, or if that was what monkeys did.

"What could be bigger?" said Bessie, eyeing Edward suspiciously.

She landed, hopped along Doris and ate a nutty crumb.

"A cannon," said Edward, fiddling with the shell, looking inside it, turning it upside down.

"A cannon?" asked Doris.

“A big gun,” said the anteater. “I saw one in the port of Montevideo. On an old galleon. Passed it on the way here. They fire cannonballs.”

“I know what a cannon is,” said Doris, indignant.

She moved her bulk, causing Edward to hold on tight as Bessie took flight.

“I’ve seen many a man fired out of a cannon,” she continued. “There was a red cannon that had big red wheels,” she started. “But the net that came with it was quite small. Then there was the cannon that fired water. And the toy cannon that fired the Italian dwarf.”

“Yes but this is a giant cannon,” declared Edward. “Before Lord Morgan left, he stood in the field in front of the leopard’s cage. He winked at the old cat, and proudly announced his name, to make sure all of us heard it again. He said he was working on building a giant cannon, that could only be operated by the cleverest animals in the whole world. He was forging the cannon back at his castle. And if we put on a big enough show, he would give the cannon to the circus. It would be ours, and it would show that animals can be trained to do anything. Of course, I’m going to light the fuse,” said Edward, as the other animals, including the anteater, started to shiver with excitement.

“That does sound like quite a cannon,” said Doris.

“We’ve got to get that cannon,” said Bessie.

“If I get fired from a cannon, I’ll be put on a poster,” said the young, giant anteater, now standing within his cage.

“We have to make tonight the biggest and best performance of our lives,” they all said in unison.

Meanwhile, across the way, in his own cage next to the water butt, the old leopard lay carefully upon his paws. He’d impressed the circus boys since the rehearsal and was glad to hear he’d caught Lord Morgan’s eye a couple of days earlier, because the bearded professor had caught his.

“If this Lord Morgan is going to make us famous,” he said

to Edward, in a slow, sly drawl, “are you still going to steal from his pocket?”

He didn't wait for an answer. He considered what he had heard, and felt prepared for the evening's performance. He licked his lips.



The Ring Master had it all worked out. Lord Morgan's arrival coincided with the night he'd planned to launch Whyte and Wingate's first hot air balloon of the season.

He selected his finest looking gypsy girl, made her wear a frilly top that exposed a little cleavage, and gave her strict instructions to beckon Lord Morgan into her basket on his arrival. Then she would give the professor the ride of his life, while Jim the Strongman held the twenty feet of balloon rope, making sure they didn't drift out into the Channel.

That would give the Ring Master time to drill his animals one last time, before the biggest performance in the circus's thirty-three year history.

He set his best two boys to work on the balloon, laying its silk on the softest patch of grass they could find, feeling it for holes. As the day's light faded, he got them to build a small fire next to the balloon. Its light and smoke illuminated the meadow, and meant the balloon's brazier could be quickly sparked should Lord Morgan arrive early.

He then followed one of his many habits, demanding a visit from the clairvoyant woman before the evening's show. She called herself Charity. She was mysterious, like all good circus clairvoyants, with dark eyes and curled hair that she flicked if she needed to distract a rich client.

She had become an early adopter of the Tarot de Marseille deck, its fifty-six cards and four standard suits allowing her to tell any tale she wished, by only remembering a fixed number

of objects and trumps. She liked that the card denoting the Fool was unnumbered and easily marked in the deck.

The Ring Master asked the clairvoyant woman to visit him in his trailer and consult her spirits. He needed to know, as he did before every performance, whether things would go well and he would make money. He also asked her to look for any sign that a mysterious benefactor might enter their lives, bringing great wealth.

On any usual evening, Charity would select a basic reading for the Ring Master, a variation on the same theme. The Emperor card would appear, signifying a man of unyielding power who brought stability to many lives. She would reveal the Sun or the Moon, and relied heavily on the Wheel of Fortune. The Ring Master never seemed to notice how often these same cards appeared, and always seem comforted by them.

Today though, she thought she would have some fun. Spurred by the white smoke drifting in through the wagon window, she recalled how she had seen Edward the monkey practising his new trick. So she turned over the Juggler card, commanding the Ring Master to make his monkey juggle fire in the Big Top. At first the Ring Master seemed doubtful and surprised. Then he started to think it through, realising that a fire-juggling monkey might be just the thing to impress Lord Morgan. He looked at his watch, and wondered if there was time to rehearse this new addition to the show. There wasn't, but there was time at least to get a sign made, and tied to the meadow gate. He would show this professor of animals just what he could train a monkey to do.

Excitedly, he stood and took Charity in his hands, cupping her face, kissing either cheek. She could smell the whisky on his breath, and was thankful he hadn't noticed her refusal to turn the last marked card. The Ring Master left his own trailer.

Charity looked at the card, which took the joy from her heart, replacing it with a dread in her stomach. She slipped the numberless

Fool into her brassiere, hoisted her long, frilled skirt and hurriedly followed the Ring Master down the trailer steps. She urgently sought Jim the Strongman. She had this feeling that something might go desperately wrong with the hot air balloon.

The first star punctured the dark blue sky. Jim the Strongman lit candles from the fire, marking the path from the road into the meadow and up to the Big Top. He listened to the clairvoyant woman, then took her by the arm and pushed her aside, tempted by her body more than her endless predictions. He ordered the clowns to dress, the balloon to be filled and applied vegetable oil to his muscles.

The high wire girls put on their soft shoes and started to stretch, split their legs and somersault on the grass. A scent of roasting chestnuts mingled with the smoke and a flag was hoisted to the summit of the Big Top, its silhouette luring undecided punters residing within a mile. A young circus boy swept the boards inside, while others drew buckets of water from the butt, ignoring the sneering leopard. They placed the pails in rows behind the Big Top, a standard precaution in case an ill wind should blow the hot air balloon sideways, tipping it or its burning brazier on to the flammable canvas below.

The Ring Master visited the animals, still gathered in their pre-show circle. He brought carrots for Doris and Edward, a slice of sheep's liver for the old cat. He never knew what to offer the giant anteater as a treat, and had never asked what he was fed. But he saw no need, given that the anteater only ran in a circle. The whip would be motivation enough.

He then spoke directly to his charges, another of his pre-show routines.

"No farting tonight Doris," he said, patting her trunk. "And no shitting on the floor."

Doris didn't understand him. She never did. She liked to repeat his words but she never really got their true meaning. She did enjoy hearing him speak through, and liked it when he touched her skin, without using an iron implement. As she felt his hand, she let out a deep rumble, which reverberated down her legs and through her feet into the soil. The Ring Master gave her a carrot.

"Plenty more in here," he said, now patting a pocket stuffed full of them. "Do everything on cue, like a good girl. We need the money."

He then noticed Edward upon her back. Unlike Doris, Edward did believe he could understand the human language, considering himself quite a connoisseur. Despite his poorly hearing, he had learned many an expression off his mother, who herself had learned to understand English while working as a tourists' monkey in Porto. Edward even thought he could distinguish humans that came from London, and those from Leeds, just by the way they spoke. This ability enabled him to learn of his mother's death, from old age supposedly, two years previously, just as Whyte and Wingate's circus had struck out for the southwest.

The Ring Master beckoned Edward to him.

"Shoulder," he commanded his monkey.

Edward skipped along Doris's back and hopped on to the Ring Master.

"Now then. Let me look at you," said the Ring Master, turning his head, pursing his lips as he tried to kiss Edward's chest.

He started whispering at his monkey, talking to him and nuzzling his fur. The Ring Master instructed Edward to pilfer many a coin, because each would go towards the circus boys' wages. It was at this point, sixty minutes before curtain up, that he also told Edward he would be juggling three sticks of fire, not two. And that Lord Morgan would be scoring him.

Bessie, feeling a little jealous, took to the air. She joined a

passing pigeon, mobbing it until she ran out of breath. She always forgot how fast pigeons can fly.

The giant anteater slept, as he liked to do for fifteen hours each day, while the Ring Master crossed the grass to take one last look at his leopard. The old boy slid up off his haunches and moved to the front of his cage. He pressed his nose up against the bars and stared at the Ring Master, his cold feline eyes watching the hairs on the human's neck. The Ring Master stared back, examining the strength of the leopard's back. He checked the claw stubs on the leopard's paws, and whether his belly hung low and full. Satisfied, the Ring Master ducked his head, threw on his hat, and marched across the field.

Tonight, he would put on the greatest show on Earth.

The first punters to arrive wore simple caps made from cloth, and braces that kept their trousers hanging above their muddy workman's boots. A few youths paid their dues, followed by their foreman, then a couple of older lads, all from the tobacco factory down the lane. Every one of them smoked a cigarette.

Standing at the entrance to the meadow, a line of candles snaking behind his back to the Big Top and its flapping flag, the Ring Master accepted their pennies, knowing they'd have none left to spend on chestnuts or candyfloss.

Three families arrived together, all related, though it was unclear which man had fathered which children, and whether any of the adults were married. One of the men refused to pay for two of the infants that ran past the Ring Master, ducking under his coat tails, claiming they weren't his.

A couple of girls wandered up. For ten minutes they stood talking by the gate, arm in arm, whispering and giggling, flinging looks at the smoking boys who were by now wrestling in the meadow, still some distance from the hot air balloon. Ignored, they paid up

and purposely walked past the youths, tightening their stomachs and bottoms, pushing out their breasts.

Then came the kids from the orphanage, who the Ring Master nodded through, knowing he had no choice. Finally, just thirty minutes before the start of the show, the carriages started to arrive.

The Ring Master liked the carriages. He appreciated the horses that pulled the large wooden wheels, how they trotted in unison and obeyed the whip. He liked the ladies that stepped out, hitching their nice dresses, and he liked the pounds lining the gentlemen's wallets. He also knew that if more than ten carriages pulled up, he would at least break even.

Tonight the Ring Master stood by the meadow gate, and began to lean on it, as carriage after carriage rolled up the lane, pausing at the entrance to his meadow. He took money from the squires and company directors as their ladies disembarked, twirling parasols as they laughed excitedly at the sign advertising a fire-juggling monkey. He stroked his beard at his good fortune, and for a moment forgot to look out for a professor's carriage.

A thundering of hooves shook the Ring Master from his reverie. Two enormous piebald shire horses cantered up the lane, throwing stones into the nettles. Across their backs a beam of polished wood pulled at an exotic black carriage suspended on leaf springs. The Ring Master checked the rig, establishing it was not for hire. The horses drew level with the gate, and stopped on a sixpence, snorting their arrival. Seated above and behind, Lord Morgan grinned down upon his host.

"A boy to store the carriage," he demanded.

Lord Morgan wore a black cape, which he threw over one shoulder as he fixed the reins and climbed down to pat the sweating horse nearest the Ring Master.

Lifting his body off the gate, the Ring Master beckoned help. As the horses and carriage were led away, Lord Morgan placed his



thumb and forefinger into his mouth and whistled.

For a moment nothing happened. Lord Morgan watched his rig disappear up the lane. He frowned and whistled again. Suddenly a small white, black and tan dog jumped from the carriage and bounded down the lane, running to his own master at the edge of the meadow. As it reached Lord Morgan it leaped at him. Lord Morgan caught the terrier in one arm, and held it as the dog licked at his buttons.

“Animals, what clever creatures!” he declared. “Now then Sir. I have my notebook. Shall we?”

Lord Morgan looked exactly as Edward had described him. He dropped the dog to the ground and took off his tall hat, his waxed brown hair parted down its centre. The hair turned grey above his ears, joining a long, tight, kempt beard that pointed at his belly. He had straight eyebrows and clear blue eyes, and stood firmly for a man close to his sixth decade. He intimidated the Ring Master, who already felt he was being scrutinised.

“Well? Shall we?” said Lord Morgan.

The Ring Master handed the gate to his returning carriage boy and walked the professor up the lane.

“We’ve got a proper show for you tonight Sir,” the Ring Master explained.

He offered Lord Morgan snuff from his box, which the professor took.

“But first, a little ride in our balloon. It’s the highest in Bristol.”

“Nonsense,” said Lord Morgan, walking past the gypsy girl. “It’s the animals I’m here to see. As agreed.”

The two men kept walking, as the empty balloon basket skidded on the grass, tied to a stake next to Jim the Strongman, who stood holding a flaccid rope, bewildered.

“And I’d rather you didn’t keep those acrobats on for too long,” said Lord Morgan, gesticulating to the trapeze troupe and high

wire girls warming up to the side of the Big Top.

He stopped walking, his dog sitting at his heels.

“In fact, show me the animals now,” he said. “I want to see them before they take their instructions.”

He removed a penny from his watchpocket and flipped it to the Ring Master. For a moment the Ring Master didn't know what to do. No paying customer had ever seen his animals in full costume before the show. And a penny wasn't much. But he knew how important Lord Morgan was to the future of Whyte and Wingate's circus. He led the professor around the back of the Big Top, past the buckets of water to the half moon of wagons, and an ornamented Doris.

The smell of Lord Morgan's dog alerted the old leopard to the approaching party. He hissed as the two men walked to his cage and began to salivate as Lord Morgan ran a pencil along his bars.

“Does he strike?” asked the professor.

“Too old,” replied the Ring Master. “But he'll impress you tonight. Mark my words.”

“How do you train him?”

“With the stick. He won't perform for food.”

“Ah ha,” was all Lord Morgan said in reply.

The professor seemed mesmerised by the leopard's sleek body, which was almost exactly the same size as that of a man. He wondered how tall the leopard would be standing on his hind legs.

“Do you have anything I can give him?” he asked the Ring Master, who opened a nearby tin and pulled out a slice of liver.

“Try this.”

Lord Morgan held the liver high above his head. The leopard watched as a drip of juice ran down the professor's wrist. Lord Morgan walked forward and put his hand between the bars, above the leopard. Cunning as he was, the old cat just stared, panting.

“Not much there,” announced Lord Morgan as he dropped the

liver, while his dog eyed the leopard intently. “The elephant, how about the elephant?”

Behind Lord Morgan’s back, the Ring Master spat into the leopard’s cage.

“That’s Doris,” he said, emphatically. “The best Indian elephant in all of England. I’ve cared for Doris since she was a calf,” he said, lying.

“And what does the elephant do?” asked Lord Morgan, as he boldly walked up to her and ran his hand down her back leg, as if feeling the health of a horse.

“More than those elephants in the Indian Army,” announced the Ring Master, proudly.

“I’m a well travelled man, Sir. But I haven’t seen a military elephant and I haven’t tested an animal this large before. Let me put it another way, have you ever seen her improvise?”

The Ring Master began to tire of the questions.

“Improvise? Like do the act all by herself? Don’t be silly, Sir,” he added, for emphasis. “This here is a well trained elephant. She’ll do all that I ask her and no more.”

Doris stood, dressed in her red hat and shawl with sequins on, and red ropes around her ankles, one of which remained tied to the ten metre chain, and listened to the men discuss her character. Failing to understand their exact meaning, she had no cause to be upset.

Edward, however, became agitated. He sat atop the anteater’s cage, above the men’s heads. He looked Lord Morgan up and down, noticing how his long greying beard obscured his pocket watch and coins. He also registered the dog, which unlike the men, looked directly at him. Edward had seen bigger dogs in his time. Some visited the show, and he’d ridden on the back of a great English Mastiff once, daring to pull at the dog’s slobbering jowls. This dog wasn’t much larger than Edward. It was out of reach. But it was off the leash, running free. And it kept staring at him. Edward was

sure he heard the dog growl. For once, the young monkey felt safer to be in the company of the old leopard.

Lord Morgan peered into the anteater's cage, but couldn't see Bear sleeping in a dark corner. He didn't spot Bessie fluttering among the bats. He took out a notebook from his inside pocket, jotted down some thoughts and demanded the Ring Master escort him and his dog to the best seat inside the Big Top.

Edward overheard the two men as they walked away. This is what he thought they said:

"This fire-juggling monkey you've advertised on the gate? Does he improvise?" enquired Lord Morgan.

The Ring Master noticed the theme, and decided to play to his gallery.

"Improvise? Oh yes, he can improvise. Does what he's told mind, just as at dinner. But he's a pin monkey. They like to do their own thing."

"So he can solve problems, can he?"

The Ring Master paused.

"Problems? Oh yes. He makes up his own act sometimes," he said, making a mental note.

He then embraced the moment.

"This big thing you're working on?" inquired the Ring Master of his guest. "You call it a cannon?"

"A cannon! Yes, a cannon," answered Lord Morgan, impressed. "It's my big idea and it'll help you with your animals and show. Tell you what, when it's done, I'll give it you. Put on a good performance as agreed, let me study your animals, and I'll promote your circus. That'll make you some money. Learn to exploit my cannon, however, and I'll make you rich!"