



## SHOWMANSHIP

### THE STORY OF PHINEAS T. BARNUM

**T**O AN AMERICAN THERE IS GLAMOUR and magic in a simple name—P. T. Barnum. As the Father of the American circus, he was one of the most spectacular showmen of all time. His daring exploits in the world of show business have become legends. This typical Yankee left his native city of Bridgeport, Conn., in the year 1835, at the age of 25, to seek fame and fortune in New York. His first business venture was a partnership in a grocery store. But the calm monotony of humdrum business could never appeal to a young man of Bar-

num's temperament. One afternoon in the store, he was talking in high excitement with Mrs. Barnum....

P. T. BARNUM: The future is gleamin' with hope, Mrs. Barnum! Our fortune is made! In one year, ye'll be dressed in fine silks. I made a remarkable purchase in Philadelphia!

MRS. BARNUM: I suspect ye, Phineas! Did ye buy more useless gimcracks we'll never be able to sell in the store?

P. T. BARNUM: I bought a negro slave, one hundred and sixty years old!

MRS. BARNUM: Ye did *what*, Phineas?

P. T. BARNUM: Wait till ye see her, Charity! She looks like she's a thousand years old! She's blind... both legs are doubled up... she's got thick bushy hair... her fingers nails are four inches long....

MRS. BARNUM: Merciful heavens!

P. T. BARNUM: She can't move but one arm... the other is stiff... but listen closely, Mrs. Barnum... she's the slave who raised George Washington from a baby! I have the original bill of sale in Mr. Augustine Washington's own handwriting! Her name's Joice Heth!

MRS. BARNUM: I... I don't understand ye, Phineas. You... you paid real money for this... this creature?

P. T. BARNUM: She'll make our fortune, Charity!

I've been thinkin' fer some time . . . I'm not in my natural sphere in a grocery store!

MRS. BARNUM: And what, pray, might yer natural sphere be?

P. T. BARNUM: I'm goin' to be a showman! The public wants to be amused, and I'm goin' to be the man to amuse 'em!

MRS. BARNUM: (*fearfully*) May I ask ye, Phineas, how much money ye spent fer this—unspeakable horror?

P. T. BARNUM: Ah, Mrs. Barnum, I was hopin' ye'd ask that! I made a sharp trade! Mr. Lindsay wanted three thousand dollars, but I persuaded him she was worth only one thousand!

MRS. BARNUM: Phineas Taylor Barnum! Ye haven't a penny in the world! And we need flour and sugar and molasses fer the store!

P. T. BARNUM: Now, honey, I was comin' to that! Ye need never worry about the store again! I sold my interest in it and . . .

MRS. BARNUM: Do I hear ye right, Phineas? Ye sold your only means of livelihood to buy that horrible creature?

P. T. BARNUM: Yes. The store only brought five hundred dollars, but I found a gentleman who was kind enough to lend me the other five hundred! Now, all I need do is engage a hall . . . exhibit this aged creature . . . and my fortune is made!

Thus began P. T. Barnum's career as a showman! And it was successful. Crowds flocked to see the shrivelled negress who prattled of little George Washington. For several months, Barnum's profits exceeded fifteen hundred dollars a week. But inevitably the novelty wore off. One day Barnum and Levi Lyman, his recently engaged assistant, stood near the entrance of Barnum's exhibition hall in New York, waiting for the time of the next exhibition. . . .

LEVI LYMAN: I'd best give you my week's notice now, Mr. Barnum.

P. T. BARNUM: Your notice? You're not leaving me, Lyman?

LEVI LYMAN: You don't need me, Mr. Barnum. The public has lost interest in Joice Heth. You can't draw water out of a stone!

P. T. BARNUM: Will ye take the word of P. T. Barnum that this hall will be packed tonight?

LEVI LYMAN: Facts are facts, Mr. Barnum! Every man and woman who wants to see the creature has seen her!

P. T. BARNUM: (*chuckling*) Ye're a shrewd man, Lyman, and ye're not afraid to contradict me! That's why I hired ye! But I'll guarantee that things will be different tonight! And speakin' of business, it's time to open the doors!

LEVI LYMAN: I'll open them, but it's scarce worth the trouble!

Lyman opened the doors with grave misgivings. But instead of the few stragglers he had expected, a great crowd was gathered outside the hall. He could hardly believe his eyes! At the sight of the open doors, the crowd surged forward clamoring for entrance. It was only with great difficulty that Lyman recovered sufficiently to shout his wares. . . .

LEVI LYMAN: (*in a loud voice*) This way to see Joice Heth! The one hundred and sixty year old slave who raised George Washington!

FIRST WOMAN: I've been here before, young man, but this time I brought my new spectacles!

FIRST MAN: Where's that faker, Barnum? Hundred and sixty year old slave! I'll learn the truth of this tonight!

FIRST WOMAN: Did ye bring that letter we clipped from the newspaper, Martha?

SECOND WOMAN: It's right here! It says she's made of Indian rubber, whalebone and is set on springs!

FIRST WOMAN: How does she talk? I'd swear she was human!

SECOND WOMAN: They do say the man who exhibits her is one of them ventriloquists!

LEVI LYMAN: Stand in line, please! Don't crowd! There's room for all!

FIRST MAN: There'd better be! This time I won't be fooled!

LEVI LYMAN: (*in excited whispers*) Do you hear them, Mr. Barnum? It's that anonymous letter the papers printed today saying Joice Heth is not a human being! Did you see it?

P. T. BARNUM: Yes. I saw it.

LEVI LYMAN: We'll have to send hundreds away! That letter turned the tide! You're a lucky man, Mr. Barnum!

P. T. BARNUM: No luck about it! When I saw business was failin', I wrote that letter myself to stir up discussion! And Lyman . . . it succeeded . . . way beyond my hopes!

Barnum's first publicity stunt was an unqualified success! As a result of that letter to the papers intimating that Joice Heth was not a human being, violent controversy arose in every city in which he exhibited her, and before she died, Barnum had amassed a respectable fortune. But in three successive business ventures, he was swindled, and in the year 1841, at the age of thirty-one, Barnum was once again . . . penniless! But he was not beaten. In the office of one of New York's real estate men, Mr. Francis W. Olmsted, a secretary announced Mr. Barnum. . . .

SECRETARY: That man is here again, Mr. Olmsted.

FRANCIS W. OLMSTED: Eh? What man?

SECRETARY: Mr. Phineas T. Barnum, sir.

FRANCIS W. OLMSTED: Well, why don't you send him away? If he has some proposition he wants us to consider, tell him to write me a letter!

SECRETARY: I have, sir, but he says he must state his business in person! He . . . he is most persistent . . . without being offensive. And he has brought these letters from Mr. Moses Y. Beach of the *Sun* and from Mr. Niblo!

FRANCIS W. OLMSTED: Why didn't you tell me? Mr. Beach is a friend of mine. Let me see the letter. Humph! Not like Beach . . . not like him at all! He says . . . "Mr. Barnum is impecunious but honorable, and is destined for success!" Strange letter . . . very strange indeed. Well . . . why are you standing there? Show the man in!

SECRETARY: Y-yes, sir. . . . This way, Mr. Barnum! Mr. Olmsted will see you!

P. T. BARNUM: (*entering*) Mr. Olmsted! I am Phineas T. Barnum and I've come to propose a plan which will make money for us both!

FRANCIS W. OLMSTED: (*with sarcasm*) Interesting!

P. T. BARNUM: I shan't waste words, Mr. Olmsted. You own the American Museum building in which Scudder's collection of curiosities is housed!

FRANCIS W. OLMSTED: Yes.

P. T. BARNUM: I want to buy that collection. I understand it's for sale!

FRANCIS W. OLMSTED: The price is fifteen thousand dollars, Mr. Barnum! I believe you are . . . er . . . do you possess that amount?

P. T. BARNUM: (*laughing*) At the moment, I am not possessed of one silver dollar!

FRANCIS W. OLMSTED: I fail to understand. . . .

P. T. BARNUM: I'm not surprised! Let me explain. I've come to ask ye to buy that collection in your own name. . . .

FRANCIS W. OLMSTED: What's that?

P. T. BARNUM: And to give me a note stating that the collection is mine, provided my payments to you are made promptly! If at any time, I fail to meet the installment on the day it's due, I'll vacate the museum and forfeit every penny I've paid!

FRANCIS W. OLMSTED: But you admit you haven't a penny, Mr. Barnum? Had you considered offering me any security?

P. T. BARNUM: My word is my security, Mr. Olmsted.

FRANCIS W. OLMSTED: In all the years in which I've engaged in business, this is the most amazing proposition that has ever been presented to me!

P. T. BARNUM: It is amazing! I'm proud to have thought of it!

FRANCIS W. OLMSTED: Just why do you think you can succeed with that worthless collection of curiosities, when Scudder has failed?

P. T. BARNUM: Ah! Because I've discovered the

value of lights, sky rockets, brass bands, publicity. That museum is a liability to you now! No one will buy that collection or rent that building because no man in this city knows what to do with it but me! You have the word of P. T. Barnum that you can't fail!

FRANCIS W. OLMSTED: Mr. Barnum, I've never won or lost a penny at gambling! It's against my principles! But . . . I may be a fool . . . I'm positive I'm a fool . . . but I'm going to gamble for the first time in my life! I'm going to take a chance on a man I've never met until today! I'm . . . I'm going to accept your incredible proposition!

Within one year, Barnum's American Museum had become so successful that he repaid Mr. Olmsted the fifteen thousand dollars with interest. His most sensational exhibit in the Museum was his midget whom he dubbed General Tom Thumb, and in the year 1844, when he was thirty-four years old, Barnum resolved to bid for European success. He embarked with the little General for England, where his amazing confidence and daring brought them to an ante-room at Buckingham Palace, waiting to be ushered into the presence of Queen Victoria herself!

TOM THUMB: Mr. Barnum! Please tell me again, quick! What am I supposed to call the queen?

P. T. BARNUM: "Your Majesty!" Whatever you

do, don't forget that, Tom. When you go in, say, "Good evening, Your Majesty, and lords and ladies!"

TOM THUMB: I'll . . . I'll try to remember. But I'm mighty scared, Mr. Barnum!

P. T. BARNUM: So am I. But shucks! They say the queen's a nice motherly lady just like . . . just like your own mother, Tom. Quiet. The doors are open!

GUARD: Your Majesty! Mr. Phineas T. Barnum from America, and the midget, General Tom Thumb!

TOM THUMB: (*in a frightened whisper*) Hold my hand, Mr. Barnum! My knees are shaking!

P. T. BARNUM: (*whispering*) Say good evening, Tom!

TOM THUMB: (*loudly*) Good evening, ladies and gentlemen!

QUEEN VICTORIA: Good evening, General Tom Thumb! Won't you come closer so that I may talk with you?

TOM THUMB: I say . . . I . . . I forgot! I was supposed to say "Your Majesty!" I'm most awfully sorry, Ma'am!

QUEEN VICTORIA: (*laughing*) I'd much prefer that you be natural, General. Are you enjoying your visit to England?

TOM THUMB: Yes Ma'am . . . I mean . . . Your Majesty!

QUEEN VICTORIA: How tall are you, General?

TOM THUMB: Twenty-eight inches, Ma'am, and

I weigh fifteen pounds. Most people want to know my weight too. Do you?

QUEEN VICTORIA: Yes. I had meant to ask that. Thank you. Is your famous General full-grown, Mr. Barnum?

P. T. BARNUM: Yes Ma'am . . . Your Majesty! He's full-grown and in perfect health. Jiminy, I forgot, Ma'am! I was told not to talk direct to you but to this gentleman!

QUEEN VICTORIA: (*graciously*) We'll dispense with court etiquette, Mr. Barnum. I'd like you and the General to be quite at ease.

TOM THUMB: I'd like to meet the little Prince of Wales, Ma'am.

QUEEN VICTORIA: And he would like to meet you, General! If Mr. Barnum will be so kind, you must visit us again in the daytime when the children are awake!

P. T. BARNUM: It will be a pleasure, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA: Will you sing a song for me, General, before you leave?

TOM THUMB: Yes, Ma'am. What would you like to hear?

QUEEN VICTORIA: A song of your own choosing!

TOM THUMB: I like "Yankee Doodle" better than any other song!

P. T. BARNUM: (*hastily*) Not "Yankee Doodle," Tom! Anything but that!

QUEEN VICTORIA: Please, Mr. Barnum. Let him sing whatever he chooses.

TOM THUMB: Shall I sing right now, Ma'am?

QUEEN VICTORIA: Yes, please.

While Barnum's brow broke out with beads of perspiration, tiny General Tom Thumb sang the spirited song of the American Revolution to Queen Victoria to Barnum's astonishment. Queen Victoria applauded generously. . . .

QUEEN VICTORIA: That was excellent, General! I venture to say this is the first time the song of your American Revolution has been heard in Buckingham Palace! And in truth, it is a spirited song!

P. T. BARNUM: You have been most kind, Your Majesty!

QUEEN VICTORIA: The General is delightful, Mr. Barnum. We shall hope to see you again before you leave England!

P. T. BARNUM: Thank ye.

QUEEN VICTORIA: Goodbye, General Tom Thumb!

TOM THUMB: Goodbye, Ma'am. I had a very nice time!

(*in a loud whisper*)

Do we really and truly have to walk out backwards, Mr. Barnum?

P. T. BARNUM: Hush Tom. Here! I'll take your

hand! Just walk slow . . . we'll be outside in a jiffy! There—it's all over Tom! You've had an audience with Queen Victoria!

GUARD: Mr. Barnum, Her Majesty wishes to present this snuff-box to Tom Thumb as a memento of his visit.

P. T. BARNUM: Thank ye, sir.

TOM THUMB: It's gold, Mr. Barnum! Solid gold!

MR. EVERETT: (*approaching*) Mr. Barnum. I am Everett . . . American Ambassador.

P. T. BARNUM: How d'ye do, Mr. Everett. I've been planning to look you up!

MR. EVERETT: I want to congratulate you! The queen is captivated by Tom Thumb! Your success throughout England and Europe is assured! Remarkable that she received you!

P. T. BARNUM: I sort of thought she would!

MR. EVERETT: There have been other midgets in England! I don't understand why she made an exception in your case!

P. T. BARNUM: There may have been other midgets in England, but there's never been another P. T. Barnum.

MR. EVERETT: (*laughing*) True!

P. T. BARNUM: It came about this way, Mr. Everett. I received the queen's invitation only after I'd sent word to her that I was leaving England immediately to show Tom to Louis Philippe, King of France!

By the time Barnum was thirty-nine years old, his American Museum had become a national institution, but he sought new worlds to conquer. In 1850, he brought the Swedish Nightingale, Jenny Lind to America and September 11th of that same year became a critical moment in Barnum's career. It was the occasion of Jenny Lind's debut in New York. The recital was being held at the Castle Garden in New York. Barnum was pacing the floor in a small room off stage. . . .

MR. GREENWOOD: Mr. Barnum! (*coming in*)

P. T. BARNUM: That you, Greenwood? Come in. I don't dare listen. How are they receiving her?

MR. GREENWOOD: Too soon to say, P. T. I couldn't stay out there. I'm too nervous.

P. T. BARNUM: How's she getting on?

MR. GREENWOOD: The crowds frightened her. Five thousand people! You could scarcely hear her first few notes. . . .

P. T. BARNUM: What? Stage fright?

MR. GREENWOOD: She sounded better after a minute but I'm no judge of voices!

P. T. BARNUM: How's the audience? Quiet?

MR. GREENWOOD: You could hear a pin drop! Wilson and Burns and all the other bankers who refused to lend you money are out there with their wives!

P. T. BARNUM: They've come to gloat! It's not

often they can see a man lose a hundred and eighty-seven thousand dollars in one night!

MR. GREENWOOD: I hate to think of it! You've mortgaged everything to bring her to America!

P. T. BARNUM: Mighty peculiar, isn't it, Greenwood? I'm gambling my entire fortune on one song! Will she ever finish? Mind opening the door a crack?

MR. GREENWOOD: I can stand it if you can, P. T. (*soprano aria is heard as door opens*)

P. T. BARNUM: (*excitedly*) Greenwood! Listen! Say, that's the most beautiful voice they've ever heard in America!

MR. GREENWOOD: Let's pray the audience thinks so! She must be getting near the end! Shall I close the door, P. T.?

P. T. BARNUM: Yes. My opinion don't count. But... I didn't know she could sing like that! Greenwood, I've learned a valuable lesson tonight! I deserve to lose my fortune! There can be such a thing as too much publicity! Suppose they take a dislike to her voice because I told them she's wonderful? It isn't fair to Jenny. Why, she sings like an angel! (*shouts and cheers are heard from distance*)

MR. WILSON: (*arriving breathlessly*) Mr. Barnum! She's magnificent!

P. T. BARNUM: (*coldly*) I'm surprised to see you here, Mr. Wilson!

MR. GREENWOOD: Mr. Barnum! They're calling for you! She's a success! They're shouting themselves

hoarse! Women are flinging bouquets at the stage! Castle Garden has never seen such a triumph!

P. T. BARNUM: Do ye mean... they like her? Are the American people really cheering a concert singer?

MR. WILSON: She sings like a lark!

P. T. BARNUM: (*with sarcasm*) Nightingale, Mr. Wilson.

MR. WILSON: Well... nightingale, then. She's wonderful! Mr. Barnum, I'll offer you one hundred thousand dollars for a half interest in Jenny Lind's American Tour!

P. T. BARNUM: What? You... Mr. Wilson, who laughed me out of your office when I tried to borrow that last five thousand dollars. You... who told me the public would never pay a penny to hear a concert singer.

MR. WILSON: I'll offer two hundred thousand, Mr. Barnum! I was wrong. I admit it!

(*shouts outside of "we want Barnum"*)

MR. GREENWOOD: They want you to make a speech P. T.! They won't let her go on with the recital till you appear!

P. T. BARNUM: I'm comin', Greenwood. As for your kind offer, Mr. Wilson, I decline! No one was willing to share the risk of this venture... and now, ... no one will be permitted to share the triumph! It's all mine!

Jenny Lind was the first European concert star



ever to venture into the United States. As a result of Barnum's pioneering efforts, new and larger music-halls were built in the principal American cities, and distinguished vocalists followed Jenny Lind's example in touring the country. P. T. Barnum, Prince of Showmen, made a contribution of inestimable value to the cause of good music in the United States. But it was not until he was fifty-eight years old that he conceived the organization which was to give him lasting fame—the first two-ring travelling circus and menagerie. And during his forty years as a showman, he had not been threatened by a serious competitor—not until the year 1880, when he was seventy years old! At that time he and the faithful Greenwood were in Barnum's Madison Square Garden discussing the appearance of a rival on the scene of American showmen. . . .

P. T. BARNUM: I must have that elephant and its mother, Greenwood! Every newspaper in the country's shoutin' about the first baby elephant born in captivity!

MR. GREENWOOD: Why couldn't one of your elephants have had a baby?

P. T. BARNUM: That's what I keep askin' myself! Who is this man James A. Bailey who thinks he can run a rival circus, and why don't he answer my telegram?

MR. GREENWOOD: Don't worry! He'll accept your offer, P. T.

P. T. BARNUM: He'd be a fool not to! I figure I was a fool offerin' him a hundred thousand in cash, but I want that elephant! I can't eat or sleep till I hear from him!

*(a knock at the door)*

Come in! Come in!

JAMES A. BAILEY: *(outside)* Mr. Barnum?

P. T. BARNUM: Yes. Who are you? I'm busy!

JAMES A. BAILEY: *(coming in)* I don't want to disturb you. My name's Bailey . . . James A. Bailey!

P. T. BARNUM: What? You're Bailey? Come right in. Did ye get my telegram? Did ye bring yer elephant? Mind you, I want the mother, too, for that hundred thousand dollars!

JAMES A. BAILEY: Sorry, Mr. Barnum. You didn't think I'd sell them did you?

P. T. BARNUM: You're refusing my offer?

JAMES A. BAILEY: I'm not only refusing . . . I've done more than that!

P. T. BARNUM: What are ye talkin' about?

JAMES A. BAILEY: You're a great showman, Mr. Barnum. You invented all the tricks of the trade! We younger men do our best, though! I brought along a handbill to show you. I've been distributing them to my patrons. I thought you'd be interested.

P. T. BARNUM: Let me see it! What? What's this?

JAMES A. BAILEY: Shall I read it to you? See—here's the caption! "This is what P. T. Barnum thinks of our baby elephant!"

P. T. BARNUM: You . . . you . . . !

JAMES A. BAILEY: And underneath, I printed your telegram in full . . . offering me one hundred thousand dollars for our baby and its mother!

P. T. BARNUM: Humph!

*(begins to chuckle)*

I'd like to shake your hand, Mr. Bailey! At last I've met a foeman worthy of me!

JAMES A. BAILEY: *(laughing)* I've been wanting to meet you for a long time, Mr. Barnum! That's why I came to turn down your telegram in person!

P. T. BARNUM: Mr. Bailey . . . I've got an idea . . . a remarkable and tremendous idea!

JAMES A. BAILEY: Yes?

P. T. BARNUM: It appears to me that when two real showmen meet . . . two superlative showmen . . . they ought to be partners, not rivals!

JAMES A. BAILEY: Why . . . you mean . . . ?

P. T. BARNUM: What would you say, Mr. Bailey, to forming a partnership with me?

JAMES A. BAILEY: It's an idea . . . a startling ideal

P. T. BARNUM: It's growing, Bailey. It's growing! If you and I were partners . . . I'd guarantee that we could produce a stupendous circus. Can't you imagine it . . . three rings . . . four stages . . . trapeze and slack wire acts all going at once and a galaxy of

clowns . . . 50 . . . count them . . . fifty! . . . How does it sound?

JAMES A. BAILEY: Tremendous!

P. T. BARNUM: Well—will you do it?

JAMES A. BAILEY: I . . . I believe I will!

P. T. BARNUM: Let's shake on it! To "The Greatest Show on Earth—A Barnum and Bailey Circus!"

And so, in his seventieth year, P. T. Barnum reached the climax of his spectacular career and set a mark in Showmanship that has never been surpassed.