

Grand Circus
Tale:

THE TIGER TAMER!

PLUCK

SPECIAL STORY FOR
THIS WEEK ::

CAPTAIN HECTOR.



"Ow! Ow! I'm
poisoned!" cried
Pringle, as the
policeman grasped
him by the wrist.

The Second Long, Complete Story.

New Series

THE TIGER TAMER.

A Tale of
Jack Talbot.

By
Harry Dorrian

CHAPTER I.

Mr. Pye Uses His Influence.

"HOUP-LA!"
Joey Pye, the clown—or as he preferred to style it, the mirth-merchant—of Tomsonio's Circus, came in at the stable door in a series of somersaults. He landed—right end up—about six inches from Jack Talbot.

Jack gave a jump, and the horse he was rubbing down gave a jump, too. Whereat Mr. Pye indulged in a prolonged chuckle.

Mr. Pye was always brimming over with animal spirits. Some mirth-merchants, off the stage, are the most serious of mortals. But there was nothing of that sort about Joseph Montgomery Pye. He was even jollier in private life than he was in the ring, and his jokes and quips and cranks never ceased except for want of breath.

"Houp-la!"

Jack Talbot laughed. He liked Joey Pye, and the clown's high spirits were infectious. Jack had been long enough in Signor Tomsonio's World-Famed Circus now to have learned something of the fat clown's manners and customs.

"Hallo, Joey!"

Mr. Pye straightened up, and watched Jack at work. The boy had not left off for a moment. He had plenty to do. A baggage hand in Tomsonio's circus was not likely to find his post a sinecure.

"You're busy, Jacky."

"Yes, rather," said Jack cheerily. "There's plenty to do."

"That's Jim Carson's pony you're looking after."

"Yes. And what a ripping animal he is!" said Jack, giving the pony an affectionate pat, which brought the animal's muzzle rubbing on his shoulder.

"Yes, too good for Carson, eh?"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Jack.

And he went on rubbing the pony down. He didn't want to say anything against Jim Carson—the Handsome Man, as he was called. Between the popular acrobat and the boy who looked after the horses there was naturally little in common, and Jack had not expected anything of the Handsome Man. He knew that Carson disliked him, however, and more than once he had had to endure the "rough edge" of the acrobat's tongue. His position in the circus placed him to some extent in the Handsome Man's power, and Carson was not the man to let an opportunity slip of gratifying his dislike. At the same time, Jack knew that it would not do for him to say what he thought about the acrobat.

"Yes, you do," said Mr. Pye coolly, seating himself on a partition, and still watching Talbot. "Jim Carson has been down on you ever since you joined the circus. I've had an eye open. And I know the reason—because you pulled Herr Biberach out of the tiger's cage when the Handsome Man finked it."

Jack was silent.

"You're fond of hosses, Jacky?" said Mr. Pye, changing the subject.

"Yes."

"What a pity you can't get a show in the ring," said the clown. "You and Miss Clotilde would make a handsome pair in the bareback act."

Jack's eyes sparkled. It was his secret ambition, and Mr. Pye had guessed it; but it was not likely to come to pass.

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NEXT
SATURDAY:

"STAUNCH AS STEEL" AND "JUNGLE JACK."

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"You'd like to get into the ring, Jack and have a show before the B. P.?"

"Can you ask?"

"Well, of course you would. Better than rubbing down hosses, however fond you may be of them," grinned Mr. Pye. "Well, I'm going to use my influence for you."

Jack laughed.

"It's not a gag this time," said Mr. Pye, seriously. "I can't get you a job as King of the Ring, or anything high-falutin'. But I've thought of a dodge for getting you into the arena, Jacky—and it's a beginning."

"Do you mean it, Joey?"

"Honest Injun!"

Jack Talbot stood up, the dandy-brush in his hand. His face was flushed with excitement.

Glad enough he had been a week or two before to get a job—any job—in Tomsonio's Circus. And his affection for horses had made the hard, long hours of stable work agreeable to him. Jack could do anything with horses, and the surliest animals were quiet under his hands. Yet though he did not repine in the stables, he naturally regarded that as merely a step to something better. To get into the ring—to have a chance with the public—that was his ambition. He felt that he could do something besides brush down horses, if he had a chance.

But what?

That was the question. And how? Jack worked away, and hoped for the best; and now his chance had come sooner than he had thought of expecting.

For Mr. Pye was serious this time.

Jack's eyes were fixed upon his face inquiringly.

The clown filled his pipe with tobacco in a leisurely way, and cramed it down with his thumb, and began to pull, without lighting it. Joey Pye did not smoke. He found it bad for the wind, and in his peculiar profession a sound wind was indispensable. But he was fond of tobacco, and he solaced himself in this way, by pulling at a loaded pipe without lighting it.

"Go on, Joey!"

Jack's voice was trembling with eagerness.

"What-ho! In time to come, when you're a great man, drawing your thousands a week in the biggest house in London, you'll remember that it was Joey Pye—Joey Pye—Montgomery Pye—who first brought you before the notice of the great B. P."

"Oh, cut it short, Joey!"

"Well, I like politeness in a growing boy, so I will," said Joey, with perfect good humour. "You remember how you yanked Herr Biberach out of the tiger's cage when Carson finked going in."

"What about that?"

"You know what was the matter with the Herr?" Mr. Pye made a gesture of tossing off a glass of wine. "The rosy gin, you know."

"I suppose he was intoxicated."

"See what it is to have a good education," ejaculated Mr. Pye admiringly. "I should have said that he was drunk. But you're quite right, Jacky, he was intoxicated."

"Oh, do come to the point, Joey!"

"Ain't I coming to it?" demanded Mr. Pye, taking another pull at his unlighted pipe. "That affair with the tigers has rather got on the Herr's nerves—and no wonder. They don't respect him so much as they did. Now, he's noticed your dodge with the animals—"

"What dodge?" asked Jack in surprise.

"The girl, my son," said Mr. Pye tentatively. "Some fellows are born with a gift for dealing with animals, and you're one of them. You can almost make the horses talk and Julia. That's the idea! Herr Biberach wants somebody to help him with his tiger show, and I thought of you at once, and the Herr jumped at the idea. It won't mean you extra pay, and it will mean some extra work; but you don't care for that."

"Not a bit," said Jack cheerfully. "I'd rather have a performance with horses, of course; but it's jolly good of you to help me to this chance. I'll join Herr Biberach with pleasure."

"Then come with me and jaw it over with him." Jack glanced towards the pony. "I haven't finished grooming Carson's pony, Joey. He brought it in all of a sweat after a run on the moor. He rides a horse very hard."

"And ease the whip hard, too," grunted Mr. Pye; "I've seen him. But never mind Carson's boss now. He's all right."

"Well, he only needs a rub with the pad now, and I can give back and do that," said Jack, and he turned to a pail of water to wash his hands.

A shadow darkened the door of the stable. Joey Pye looked round, and gave a low whistle as he saw that it was Carson.

The dark, handsome face of the acrobat was darker than usual. Joey Pye thought he could guess the cause. The Handsome Man's dislike of Jack Talbot was no secret in the circus. And no doubt Carson had just heard of the chance Herr Biberach was giving to the stable hand.

Carson glanced at his horse. "Have you finished him, Talbot?" Jack looked up, towelling his hands. "Almost, sir. He only wants a rub with the pad."

"Do you call him clean?" said Carson, with a sneer, coming closer to the horse. "Are you going to leave him in this state?"

Jack flushed hotly. "It was not pleasant, in any case, to be accused of leaving a horse in an unclean state, and it was false; the pony had been well-groomed."

"Yes, I am going to leave him like that," he said. "He is all right. You know that."

"That's not the way to speak to me, you cub!" Carson's eyes were snapping with anger. Jack's own were blazing as he faced him. He had long endured, with what patience he could, the sneers and the bullying tone of the Handsome Man. But he had sometimes felt that the end must come—and now it seemed to him that it had come.

Carson had a right to give orders to a stable hand. But Jack was not to be bullied, and he felt that he had put up with as much as he meant to put up with.

Carson pointed to the horse. "You'll do that again—from head to tail. I'm not going to have my pony left in a filthy state by a lazy stable brat."

"He is not in a filthy state." "Don't answer me back! Get to your work." Jack did not stir.

"Do you hear me?" "I am not deaf," said Jack, in a low, quiet voice—a voice that was dangerously quiet. His temper was reaching boiling-point.

"Then obey me." "I have done all that I intend to do." "You young cub!"

Jack bit his lip to keep back the fierce words that rose. He towelled his hands almost convulsively. If there was to be a brawl, he would not begin it.

Carson mistook his silence. He picked up a riding-whip, and strode towards the lad. "Get to your work!" "Not at your orders."

"Then take that." "You hound! Stop!" shouted Joey Pye. But Carson's arm rose and fell. The riding-whip cracked across Jack's shoulder.

The boy's eyes blazed. The pail, full of soapy water, was at his feet. In an instant he had caught it up and flung the contents full in the face of the Handsome Man.

Joey Pye had started forward, as if to restrain the brutality of the Handsome Man; but now he stopped and turned a somersault in sheer delight.

The swagger of the Handsome Man made him many enemies, and Joey Pye, who he had treated with rude contempt as a mere clown, and far beneath his notice, disliked the acrobat as much as anyone.

"Hou-lal! Go it!" shrieked Mr. Pye. "This way for a froth wash! Ha, ha, ha! Handsome, old man, your moustache is coming out of curl!"

Carson gave a growl of rage. The riding-whip had dropped from his hand. He drove his knuckles into his eyes, to clear them of the stinging soapy water.

"You cub! I'll—I'll smash you!" Jack whirled up the heavy pail as he came springing forward.

"Stand back!" Even the enraged acrobat hesitated for a moment.

"Don't lay a finger on me again," said Jack tensely; "I'll knock you down if you do. Stand back!"

"You cub!" "You can say what you like. You are a man and I am a boy—but you won't bully me! You cad!"

Carson gritted his teeth with anger. His hands dropped to his sides.

"Very well," he said savagely. "Very well. I will make you smart for this, you cub! You—you beggar, you were taken on here to save you from starving. Either you leave the circus or I do. I think you can guess which the signor will choose."

And the enraged acrobat strode from the stable. Jack dropped the pail with a clatter on the stones.

The anger had died out of his face, and his brow was clouded. Joey Pye was chuckling gleefully.

"By gum!" he said. "I never saw the Handsome Man taken down like that before! Jacky, my pippin, you do me proud, you do really!"

"It means the sack, Joey."

The clown looked anxious for a moment. "I don't know! I know the signor won't like to part with Carson; but then Carson won't like to part with the signor. He's got a good berth here."

"A stable boy's of not much account. I shall have to go."

"Not if Miss Clotilde can help it, I'll be bound. You've got a good friend there," said Joey Pye. "But come with me now, and let's see the Herr. If he takes you on in his tiger turn, you'll have a hold on the circus, see?"

Jack brightened up, and followed the clown from the stable.

Tomsonio's World-Famed Circus was pitched at Oakwood, and for some days had been drawing a good house. The circus animals, and most of the company, were accommodated in a range of buildings, while the great tent in which the performances were given was pitched in an adjoining field.

As Jack and Joey left the stable, a girl of fifteen came down the steps of a large and handsome caravan, and the boy raised his cap.

It was Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring. The girl came towards him with a sweet smile.

Although she was prettily and daintily dressed, and Jack was in the rough garb and heavy boots of a stable-lad, her manner did not seem to indicate that she was conscious of any difference of station between them.

From the morning when Jack had saved Clotilde from the attack of the footpads in Abbotdale Woods, the boy and girl had been friends—circus comrades.

"I am so glad, Jack!" exclaimed the girl. "You are to appear in the ring. I heard the signor tell Herr Biberach so."

Jack nodded cheerfully. "Yes, I am just going to the Herr."

"I will come with you." Clotilde's face clouded for the moment. "Jack, are you not afraid of the tigers?"

The boy laughed. "I am not a coward, Clotilde!"

"One might be afraid of the tigers without being a coward," said the girl. "Even the Herr is not so confident as he used to be, since the time they turned on him. You will not run too great risks, Jack?"

"I don't suppose Herr Biberach would allow me to do so, Clotilde, if I wanted to," said Talbot, with a smile.

"Here you are, ladies and gentlemen," said Joey Pye, who never could shake off his circus manner. "Here you are, the tiger-house!"

The tiger-house was a small, gloomy barn, into which the great cage had been wheeled. Clotilde drew a quick breath as she looked at the upright iron bars of the cage, behind which Julius and Julia, the tiger and tigress, were moving to and fro.

CHAPTER 2.
In the Tiger's Cage.

JIM CARSON uttered a yell and staggered back, drenched and blinded by the water. His handsome face, his carefully waxed moustache, his natty clothes streamed and ran with the soapy water. Jack, careless of the consequences of his act, stood facing him with flashing eyes, the stable pail still in his hand.

Huge and terrible the tigers looked, yet Herr Biberach, the tiger-tamer, had been in the habit of entering their cage, and putting them through tricks with perfect ease. The Herr had been a great animal tamer in his time, and it was not age that had impaired his powers. The big German, kind and good-natured to a fault, was the slave of drink, and of late he had allowed his indulgence to interfere with his work, as well as wasting all his leisure time.

Herr Biberach had been kind to Jack, on the few occasions when they had come into contact, since the boy had joined the circus. He had not forgotten that Jack had entered the cage at the risk of his life to drag him from the claws of Julius.

The German nodded to them as they entered.
"Ach! You have bring mein young friend!" he remarked.

"Here he is, safe, sound, and sober!" said Mr. Pye cheerily. "Ready to put his head in the tiger's mouth, and to have it chewed off if necessary."

The German grinned.
"You was not afraid to enter the cage, ain't it, Shack?"
"No!" said Jack sturdily, though, as he looked at the two great snuffing animals, his face became graver, "I'm not afraid!"

"I tinks tat you are prave," said the German, looking at him. "I tinks tat you help me mit te tigers, ain't it? I tinks, perhaps, you like tat petter as vorking in te stable, ain't it?"

"I'd prefer it, sir."
"Goot! Den if you able to do tat, I make te signor giff you te me, and take on anoder poy for te horses, after. Come dis vay. Mees Clotilde, I am going to open te door of te cage."

The girl did not move.
"I am not afraid, Herr Biberach!"
The Herr nodded and smiled.
"Follow me, Shack!"
"Yes, sir."

And the Herr entered the cage, with the boy at his heels. The tigers looked round, snuffing. Jack's face remained quiet and calm. But as the door of the cage was fastened, a thrill like ice ran through him. He was shut up in the cage, without the possibility of escape, with two terrible animals, either of which could have killed him with the stroke of the paw.

Yet his nerve remained steady. And the Herr, looking at him keenly to judge the effect of the fastening of the door, gave a grunt of approval.

CHAPTER 3, Jack's New Master.

LOTILDE watched them through one of the bars of the cage. Mr. Pye was equally interested. When the door was opened, Mr. Pye had shown a strong inclination to get further away; but as Clotilde did not move, the fat clown remained where he was.

Jack knew that the girl was looking at him, and the knowledge of it braced him. Had he been afraid, he would not have shown a sign of it, with Clotilde's eyes upon him.

But he was not afraid.
"Goot!" said the Herr. "I tinks tat you vas prave poy, Shack. I tinks tat you helps me mit te tigers, ain't it?"

"I hope so, sir."
"You likes te shob, Shack?"
"Yes, sir, I should like te job."
"Goot!"

The Herr cracked his whip.
"Now, den, Julius, you lazy peast! Shump!"
Julius showed no inclination to jump.

Perhaps his late insubordination, when the Herr had ventured into the cage the worse for liquor, and had been struck down, had shaken the thrall in which he held the huge animals.

Certainly they did not seem obedient as of old. But the German tamer was quite himself now. His big blue eyes blazed as he looked at the rebellious tiger, and his face set like iron.

"Shump!"
The whip cracked, and the tip of the thong touched the hide of Julius. The tiger sullenly rose, and jumped over the whip.

"Goot!"
The German turned to Julia, the tigress.
"Julia! You pretty peast! You shump—shump!"
Julia jumped without remonstrance.

The Herr looked satisfied.
"Tat is all right!" he said. "Now, den, Shack, you take te whip!"

"Yes, sir."
"Make dem shump!"
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Jack looked a little doubtful. It was easy enough to take the whip, and to jump, but to make them do it might be another matter of his teacher, and he did it.

He cracked the whip as the Herr had done.
Julius to jump.
The tiger blinked at him.

Herr Biberach waved a thick, flexible cane, which was heavily weighted with lead, a terror to the animals required. He held it by the leaded end, and now, however, "Julius!"

The tiger blinked from one to the other.
"Allez!" shouted the Herr.
Still Julius did not move.
Crash!

The cane came down upon the broad flank of Jack expected him to turn upon the Herr, but he did not. He ambled towards Jack, and the boy's nerve held.

But the hand with which he held the whip was still. The tiger jumped over it.
Clotilde clasped her hands. Her heart had been painfully for the last minute.

"My aunt Gloxiana!" murmured Mr. Pye. "Did I say he could work it? Didn't I?"
The tiger and the tigress, one after the other, looked at Herr, and jumped over the long whip Jack held in his hand. Then he made them race round the cage, cracking the whip as they ran.

"Now I shows you te new dodge," said Herr Biberach. "I tinks tat ve introduce it into te show, ain't it?"
Jack's eyes were sparkling now.

He was getting accustomed to the tigers, and he would soon grow fond of the great animals, though they were to look at.

"Yes, sir. What is it?"
"I shows you, ain't it?"
The German lay down on the floor of the cage, and remained quite still.

"You makes dem shump over me," he said. "I makes Julius take my belt in his teeth, and jump round te cage, ain't it?"
"What-ho!" said Jack.

It was some time before Julius could be made to go through this new performance, and then not very patiently. But it was a beginning. The Herr declared himself satisfied, and they left the cage, Herr Biberach locking up the door very carefully.

"I tinks tat Shack is a prave boy, and he suits me better te earth," said Herr Biberach, probably meaning to get the ground. "I tink tat I takes him, ain't it? After one week of practice, he appears in te cage mit me, and before te public, and ve puts him on te pills as 'The Tiger Tamer.'"

"I am so glad, Jack," said Clotilde, in a low tone.
"I am glad if you are, Clotilde. This may make a difference between staying and leaving."

She looked at him quickly.
"Why! You were not thinking of leaving?"
"I believe Carson is trying to get rid of me."
"The signor would not consent."
"I hope not!"

Clotilde looked troubled. Kind and good-natured as Tomsonio was, he was a keen business man. He had a great deal of money, but Carson was a great draw in the circus, and that was for much.

A man came in before she could reply, and signed to her to follow.
Talbot.

"Signor Tomsonio wishes to speak to you, Talbot."
"Where is he, Harris?"
"In the tent, sir."

"Is the Handsome Man with him?" asked Jojo.
"Yes, Mr. Pye."
"I'm coming," said Jack.

Herr Biberach looked at the lad curiously.
"I tinks tat I comes also," he said. "Val you Shooy?" The Herr meant, "What do you say?"
"I say yea," said Jojo. "Come on."

Clotilde touched Jack's arm as they went out of the tamer's quarters.
"Tell me afterwards, Jack, if—if there is trouble, I shall not drive you away if I can help it."

"I will come to you at once, Clotilde."
Jack Talbot, Mr. Pye, and the German tamer, with the way to the huge tent in which the circus performance was given. Signor Tomsonio—otherwise Dick Thompson—was standing there in his resplendent waistcoat, with his hands in his hand. He had been looking round the arena, and was being prepared for the evening's performance.

Handsome Man found him.
Carson was with him now, and his black horse was

that his anger was not appeased. He had cleaned off the water that had streamed over him in the stable, and looked his usual natty self again, as far as that was concerned, but his eyes were still burning with anger. The signor was looking worried.

"You sent for me, sir?" said Jack, touching his cap.
"Yes, lad. It seems that you have been chucking water over Mr. Carson."

"He struck me, sir."
"I punished him for neglecting my horse," said Carson. "The whip is employed to look after the horses."

"The horse was not neglected," said Jack quietly. "The signor can go and look at him now, and if he says the horse was neglected you can use your riding-whip on my shoulders as much as you like."

"That's fair," said Signor Tomsonio.
The acrobat bit his lip.
"Never mind the horse now," he said. "The question is whether a member of the company is to be insulted by a stable-hand. If you don't discharge Talbot, signor, I don't remain in the company—that's all."

Signor Tomsonio gave Jack a worried look.
"You see how it stands, sonny?" he said awkwardly. "I can't part with one of the principal performers, and I can't have these rows every day. I want to do the best I can for you, because you saved Clotilde from the footpads—"

Jack flushed red.
"Don't let that make any difference," he said quickly. "If I'm not worth my salt, I don't want to stay. Mr. Carson has disliked me from the day I joined the circus, and has wanted me to go."

Carson shrugged his shoulders.
"I'm not likely to take the trouble to dislike a stable-hand," he said. "I don't think an insolent brat should stay in the circus if he doesn't know his place."

The signor rubbed his fat nose, a trick he had when he was worried. He liked Jack, but he could not afford to quarrel with Carson.

"I'd better go, sir," said Jack, feeling that it was "up" to him to extricate the circus-master from a difficult position. "You've been very kind to me here, sir, and I shall always remember it. I don't want to make trouble. I'll clear."

"Well, you see—"
Joey Pye nudged the burly German. Herr Biberach nodded to the clown and opened his mouth.

"I tinks tat I speak a vord now, ain't it?" he remarked.
"I tinks tat Shack shall not go, pefore, ven I have peen to te trouble of teaching him te new tricks in te tiger's cage. I tinks you advertises him on te pills—"

"What pills?"
"Te show-pills."

"Oh, te bills!" said the signor. "Advertise Jack on te show-bills! Off your rocker, Bibby?"

"I tinks tat I says vat is gorrect," said the Herr obstinately. "I tinks you puts him on te pills as Shungle Shack, te Poy Tiger-tamer."

"Jungle Jack!" said Mr. Pye, clapping his hands with a report like a pistol-shot. "Ripping! Splendacious! Rappacious! Is he all right in the cage, Herr?"

"He is ribbing!"
"You think he will be a draw?"
"I tinks so meinself, pefore."

"H'm! That rather alters the case, Carson."
The Handsome Man scowled.

"You can choose between him and me!" he said.
"Between him and Herr Biberach, und Garson," said the German quietly. "I tinks tat I not part mit Shack because Garson not like him. I tinks tat I sticks to Shack. I tinks tat if he go, I go; and if I go, mein tigers go. I tinks tat—"

"Oh, hang it, that's enough tinkin!" said Signor Tomsonio. "I don't want you to go—and you seem to have forgotten your contract, too!"

"Plov te contract! I not allows mein poy to be sent away to please dat rodder! In mein contract I haf te right to employ whom I please mit meinself."

The signor brightened up wonderfully.
"You're hit it, Herr Biberach! You see, Carson, the master's out of my hands now. Herr Biberach certainly has the right to employ anybody he pleases, and I did not reserve the right to interfere in the wording of the contract. You see, I am quite powerless in the matter."

Carson gritted his teeth.
"I love this to you, you fat worm!" he snarled, turning to Joey Pye.

"Mr. Pye placed his hand on his heart and bowed. "Your devoted," he said cheerfully. "As a matter of fact, I suggested it to the Herr, and the Herr played up like a blue man. Perhaps you'd like me to leave the circus, Mr. Carson? Perhaps you'd like the signor to leave? Perhaps you'd like the whole circus to get out—company and horses,

and tigers and camels, and caravans and all, and leave you here on your giddy lonesome!"

The Handsome Man made no reply to that playful suggestion. He felt that he was defeated, and he walked away with a scowl on his brow. The signor seemed much relieved when he was gone. Signor Tomsonio was good-nature itself. He hated displeasing people, even when they were in the wrong, and disconcerted faces worried him. But he was glad Jack was not to go.

"You've found a good friend in Herr Biberach," he said. "He's got his faults, but he's all right. You like helping with the tigers?"

"Yes, sir."
"Then that's your business from to-day," said the signor, very satisfied. "You'll show up in the ring as soon as possible. I'm glad you're staying. Keep clear of Mr. Carson as much as you can. His temper's a little rusty, that's all, but he's a good chap in the main."

Jack had some doubts about the last part of the signor's sentence. He did not put them into words, however—he hurried away to find Clotilde and tell her the fortunate result of the interview.

CHAPTER 4.

A Snake in the Grass.

FOR the next few days Jack Talbot assiduously practised his new duties in the tiger's cage. He soon became accustomed to Julius and Julia, and they became accustomed to him, and attached to him, more than to their trainer. Jack had, as Mr. Pye declared, a gift with animals. He had been able to deal with the surliest beast in the signor's stables, and he found it was easy to get on good terms with the two huge animals whom few other members of the circus company would have ventured to approach.

Julius would feed from his hand, baring the great teeth that could have nipped off his arm at a bite, but Jack did not feel a tremor. After a few days, Julius was no more to him than a huge cat.

Herr Biberach observed his progress with great satisfaction. There was nothing like jealousy about him, although he saw that Jack would soon be able to do things with the tigers that he could never do. The Herr doubtless had his own end in view, and Joey Pye was not long in guessing the German tamer's thoughts on the subject. The new act, in which the Herr counterfeited sleep and was dragged round the cage by the teeth of Julius, was practised and perfected, and more details of it developed. Mr. Pye watched it one day through the bars of the cage, with a grin upon his plump face.

He was still grinning when Jack came out of the cage after his work.

"Come along, sonny," said Mr. Pye, tapping him on the shoulder. "Which way are you going, Bibby?"

"To te par," said Herr Biberach.
"Good! So am I! This way, Jacky!"

Jack hesitated a moment, and then followed his friend. The bar was the place he least frequented. Even had he been inclined to begin a foolish indulgence in liquor at his early age, the example of the Herr before his eyes would have been sufficient to deter him. Herr Biberach was on the down grade, and it was only a question of time before his weakness would be his ruin. Already once it had placed his life in danger.

Herr Biberach was in an excellent temper, and he was inclined to stand unlimited drinks for all who cared for them. The Handsome Man was in the bar, talking to Samson, the Strong Man, and he looked round as the three came in. He had not spoken a word to Jack since the day of the interview with the signor, when Talbot had not been discharged after all.

"Vat is yours, Shoey?" asked the Herr hospitably.
"Plain soda," said Mr. Pye, rolling his eyes comically; "plain soda. It's better for me. I like it. Only I'll have a little whisky in it—doctor's orders, you know. Plain soda—and whisky."

The Herr grinned—he knew Joey Pye of old!
"And vat is yours, mein poy?"

"Ginger-beer," said Jack.
The Herr grinned again, and the Handsome Man laughed. Jack coloured to his ears, but he was not foolish enough to allow a rude laugh to make any difference to him.

"I tinks tat you haf peen yorling mooch," said the Herr.
"I tinks tat you needs te refresher, ain't it?"

"I'm not tired," said Jack.
"But I tinks—"

"Let the kid alone, Bibby," said Mr. Pye. "He's got sense. You can't both do a sleeping act in the tiger's cage, you know."

"Ha, ha! Tat is vunny!"
"It wouldn't be funny for you if Jack came into the cage half-dead over!" said Mr. Pye. "Let him alone. He's got sense."

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NEXT SATURDAY:

"STAUNCH AS STEEL" AND "JUNGLE JACK."

sense. I wish I'd always stuck to ginger-beer. I was reckless in my younger days, dear boys, and now I need a stimulant. I used to take it for pleasure, and now I take it by order of my medical man. Take warning by me, Jacky, and let it alone. But it's all right, Bibby—I can manage Jacky's little lot for him!"

"I tinks tat you vas right," said Herr Biberach, finishing his second glass. "I tinks te poy has sense. You vas right, Shack!"

"Thank you!" said Jack, laughing and sipping his ginger-beer.

The Handsome Man was watching them, with a wicked glint in his black eyes. He strolled over towards them with an agreeable smile.

"So you find your new assistant useful, Bibby?" he said.

"Ja, ja."

"Then I'm glad he didn't go! But there's no malice over that little disagreement, I hope?" said the Handsome Man. "Of course, I didn't know that you wanted the boy, when I asked the signor to sack him!"

"Dat is all right," said the Herr, looking lovingly at his third glass of whisky-and-water—a great deal of whisky and very little water. "I neffer bears te malice, and I tink tat is all right. Vill you shoin me?"

"I'll join you with pleasure."

Jack was silent.

He did not quite see the Handsome Man's drift, but he felt instinctively that his pleasant manners were assumed for some secret purpose.

The German drank with Carson, and Carson with the German, and they kept it up for some time. Only Jack noticed that Carson drank little each time, and either suffered his glass to be removed half full, or spilt a quantity of the liquor in the sawdust.

Herr Biberach, however, drank deep each time, and the result was soon apparent.

His speech became thick, his big blue eyes rolled, and he showed a strong desire to become on familiar and affectionate terms with everybody in the bar.

The boy watched the scene in silent anger.

Carson was deliberately making the tiger tamer drunk, though why he should be wasting his money for the purpose Jack could not yet understand.

Neither could Mr. Pye.

The clown, too, was watching Carson, and he did not "catch on." But, certainly, the Handsome Man, whatever his motive was, succeeded in his object.

"I—I t-t-tink tat I has vun more," said Herr Biberach, holding on to the bar, "and den I tinks tat I goes. Shack! Vere is Shack?"

"Here I am, sir!"

"I tinks dat I am sleepy, and tat you helps me, ain't it?"

"Lean on my shoulder, sir. This way!"

"I haf not finish my trink!"

"One more round, Bibby!" said the Handsome Man, with a jovial laugh.

"Ach! Ja, ja!"

"Come now, sir!" whispered Jack, trying to draw the Herr away.

"Mind your own business, you whelp!" muttered the Handsome Man fiercely. "Who the deuce are you to interfere with your master?"

"Ach! Ja, ja! I vill not be interfered mit."

"Better come, sir."

"Ach! Ja! Perhaps I had potter gone!"

"Another drink, Herr!"

"Ja, ja! Vun more, ain't it?"

The Herr's wits were too confused by this time to know what he wanted. He had the other drink, however, and it finished him. He had consumed enough to make two ordinary men intoxicated, and even his capacity was not unlimited. He staggered away from the bar, lurched, and threw his arms round Jack's neck. The boy, strong as he was, was not equal to the sudden weight of the burly German. He rolled on the floor, with the big German sprawling over him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Handsome Man laughed heartily.

The sight was certainly absurd. Jack scrambled up, and tried to raise the German, but Herr Biberach was too heavy.

He sat in the sawdust, and smiled idiotically.

"I tinks tat I goes to sleep, ain't it," he remarked.

"Come to your quarters, sir," urged Jack.

"Ach! Go away!"

"But—"

"I tells you tat it is not time for te performance," said

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Herr Biberach. "Go away! Tell te signor I comes on te time, ain't it!"

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Go away! I vill not leaf mein ped!" said Herr Biberach, apparently under the impression that he was in bed now. "I refusos to get up too early. It is ped te mein healt, ain't it. I tinks tat I have thirst!"

"You have a jolly big thirst," murmured Mr. Pye, "it will get you into trouble, too. I'll lend you a watch, Jacky!"

They tried to raise the stout German, one on either side. But Herr Biberach's mood had now become pugnacious.

"I tells you tat te poy shall not go!" he exclaimed, striking out suddenly, and flooring the unfortunate Mr. Pye.

"Take tat, you Garson!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Handsome Man.

Mr. Pye sat up and rubbed his nose.

"By gum!"

"I tinks tat I knocks you down, ain't it? Te poy shall not go! He vill be useful to look after te tigers ven I haf been trinking, ain't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's letting out secrets now," grinned Mr. Pye, getting up. "Here, lend a hand, Sammy, and let's get te poy duffer to bed."

"I vill not go to ped!"

"Won't you?" said Samson, with a grin, and he lifted the Herr as easily as if he had been a child. "This way in!"

"I tinks—"

"You've done enough 'tinking.' Come along!"

And in Sammy's grip the Herr had no choice but to come along. But he did not resist. He turned a smile of benediction upon Sammy.

"You vas mein tear friend," he murmured. "I tinks tat I luff you. I giff you something!"

He dragged out his watch, and jerked it off the chain. It was a valuable watch, set with brilliants, which had been presented to the Herr on some important occasion.

"I giffs you tat, Sammy! I luffs you!"

"Oh, rats!" said Sammy.

"You takes it, mein friend."

"Here, I'll take it," said Mr. Pye, jerking his watch away, and putting it into his pocket. "Lucky for you you're among friends, you duffer. Jacky, my boy, take example by this intoxicated person, and never—never—"

Mr. Pye's face became long and solemn—"and never—never wear a gold watch when you go on the raffle!"

And Herr Biberach was shifted home to bed. He sank on his bed, and kicked out furiously when Jack tried to take his boots off. But his moods changed quickly, for he smiled sweetly at the clown as he unfastened his collar.

"I tinks tat you vas mein goot friend," he said. "I giffs you a vatch."

And he felt over his waistcoat for it.

Mr. Pye chuckled.

"I've got it already," he remarked. "Don't trouble!"

"I tinks tat I go to sleep, ain't it?"

"That's about the best thing you can do."

And Herr Biberach did it. They left him there. Mr. Pye slapped Jack on the shoulder, as he caught the glossy look on the boy's face.

"Cheero, Jackie! It's not your business, you know."

"It's a shame!" said Jack fiercely. "Carson did it on purpose."

Mr. Pye nodded thoughtfully.

"Well, that's so. But Bibby has got like it often enough without Carson's assistance. No good bothering. It can't be helped."

"He's such a kind, good fellow. It's rotten!"

"It's the kind, good fellows who often get taken like that," said Mr. Pye, with a wise shake of the head. "Too easy going, you know. 'I'm sorry for the Herr. It's growing on him, too. He knows it himself. That's why he's plannin' that sleeping act in the tiger's cage."

"What do you mean?"

"In case he turns up drunk for the performance again, as he did before."

"I never thought of that."

"You haven't been lookin' on at the things as long as I have, Jacky. That's his little game, and a jolly deep one, only it would be better to slack on the drink. But he can do that, poor chap. The time to make a stand again is when you're young."

And Mr. Pye shook his head sadly, and relished his pressed feelings by turning a series of handspicings, which alighted finally just behind Puggles, the tumbler, with yell that made Puggles jump almost out of his skin.

Herr Biberach, and he would have done anything for the kind-hearted German; and he mentally resolved that all that he could do to help the tiger tamer, in spite of his unhappy weakness, should be done.

An able and devoted assistant might enable the German to keep on the tiger show for a long time after he had become unable to deal with it by himself, and every day now the unhappy man seemed to take a further step on the down grade.

It was partly due to the influence of the Handsome Man. Carson seemed to stick to Herr Biberach like his shadow.

There was one harder drinker in the company than Herr Biberach, and that was the man known as the "Doc."

But even the Doc was outdone now by the German tiger tamer. Every day he was more or less under the influence of liquor, and he seldom or never went to his bed sober.

Jack saw it, helpless to interfere, and chafing with anger. He understood at last that Carson was aiming at him through the Herr, though he did not yet fully understand the object of the Handsome Man.

On this afternoon, as Jack hurried off to the Herr's quarters, after speaking with the signor, he had forgotten for the moment the state in which he usually found the Herr now.

But it was recalled to his mind as he came into the shadowy building where the great cage was kept.

Herr Biberach was there, and so was the Handsome Man, and they were seated at a small table with a bottle between them.

Carson, who, in spite of his rascality, was usually temperate—he needed to keep a clear head for his dangerous avocation—was only pretending to drink, affecting to empty and fill his glass, but in reality hardly touching a drop of liquor.

But the German was drinking deep, as usual. His flushed face and heavy eyes showed that the potent influence of the spirit was already strong upon him.

Jack paused in the doorway, and surveyed the scene in silent anger and dismay.

It was already half-past five, and the performance was timed to commence at half-past six.

On the day of Jack's first appearance in public, he naturally wanted everything to go as well as possible; but with the Herr in this state, things were not likely to go well.

He thought he comprehended Carson's game at last. The acrobat was fully determined that he should not succeed in his new role, and this was the way he had adopted of preventing him.

If Herr Biberach could not go on to take his show, Jack could not go on either.

Carson looked round, and caught the lad's flaming eyes. He grinned evilly.

"One more, Bibby," he said.

"Ach! Ja!"

Talbot sprang forward.

"You shall not!"

Carson gritted his teeth.

"Out, you interfering puppy!"

"You coward!" cried Jack, his long-restrained wrath bursting out. "You cur! You are doing this on purpose."

"Ach! Vat is all tat?"

"Don't drink any more, sir," said Jack, calming down a little. "The performance begins in an hour."

"Ach! I vas all right, ain't it?"

"Of course you're all right," said the acrobat, with a venomous glance at Jack. "You want another dose to give you a nerve."

"Tat is gorrect."

"The performance begins in an hour," said Jack, laying his hand on the German's broad shoulder. "For goodness' sake, sir, don't have any more! You remember what happened before."

"The boy is right, ain't it?"

"If you're going to be ordered about by a stable hand, I don't mind," said the Handsome Man, with a scornful laugh.

"Ach! I tinks not."

"Come, have another!"

"Ja, ja! I tinks so."

The Handsome Man took the bottle, and began to fill the German's glass. Herr Biberach's eyes were swimming in

his head, and he blinked stupidly from Jack's flaming angry face to the dark countenance of the acrobat.

Jack gritted his teeth, and struck the bottle from the hand of the Handsome Man, and crashed upon the floor. Smash! The bottle broke into fifty pieces, and the whisky ran over the stones.

The Handsome Man leaped to his feet, his face flushed with rage.

"You whelp!"

He sprang towards the boy, Jack faced him with his hands up, his fists clenched hard.

"Come on, then, you coward!"

But a strong grasp was laid upon the Handsome Man, and he whirled round fiercely to find himself in the arms of Samson, the Hercules.

"No, you don't," said Samson quietly.

"Let me go!"

"You are not going to touch the boy!"

"I'll do as I like, hang you!"

"Not while I'm around. You won't lay a finger on the boy drunk for just before the performance?"

"Mind your own business!"

Samson breathed hard through his nose.

"I'll let you go," he said quietly. "But if you lay a hand on the boy, I'll lay a hand on you, and so hard that you'll remember it."

And he released the Handsome Man.

Carson looked at him, panting with rage. But braver than he might have hesitated to attack the herculean Samson Man of the circus.

With a savage sneer on his lips, he turned to Jack.

"You will not get off so easily another time!" he exclaimed. And he strode from the room.

Jack looked at Samson in great distress.

"Thank you for interfering," he said. "But—but what am I to do for the Herr?"

And Samson, who was big and burly and good natured, but not particularly bright in the intellectual line, rubbed his chin thoughtfully, and confessed that he gave it up. But a quicker wit was at hand. Mr. Pye had seen the acrobat leave, and he came in quickly.

CHAPTER 7.

The Madness of Herr Biberach!

MR. PYE took in the situation at a glance. The Herr sitting at the table, nodding from the effect of his potatoes, the smashed bottle on the floor, told him enough.

"I rather expected something of this sort," he remarked. "Can't interfere with a man old enough to know better, though."

"Ach! I tinks I knows potter, ain't it?"

"You ought to, at your time of life!" said the clown, in disgust. "Performance due in less than an hour—your bills out—and the Tiger Tamer in this state. My cocked hat, what will the signor say?"

"Can't we do something?" said Jack.

The German raised his head a little, and blinked at them. His hands mechanically felt over the table for his glass. Mr. Pye knocked it away before he could reach it. The glass smashed beside the bottle.

The drunken man hardly noticed it. He began to sing a powerful bass, which was rendered curiously whorpy in places by his state:

"Im kuhlen koller sitz ich hier,
Auf einen Fass voll Rebon."

"Ach! Vere is mein glass, ain't it? Pour out to the vine, let it flow! Like a free and pounding river, ain't it?"

Mr. Pye grinned.

"There's a picture for you!" he remarked. "Lend me a hand with him, Sammy. He'll come round all right if you duck him well."

"Ach! I will not be duck!"

"That's your mistake," said Joey Pye cheerfully. "You're going to bring you round, if it costs me a leg. Yank him out, Sammy!"

"What-ho!" said Sammy.

They yanked him out. Between them he was run out the yard, where a deep trough, full of water, stood for the use of the animals. The clown ruthlessly thrust the German's head deep into the chilly water.

Jack looked on. It was probably the best thing to do for the Herr. At all events, Mr. Pye, doubtless, had more experience in such matters than Jack had.

The German spluttered and foamed wildly as his head went in, and struggled. His face and hair were dripping with water as he was dragged out again.

"Ach! Tat you let go! Yah! Stop it, ain't it!"

ANSWERS

ONE PENNY.

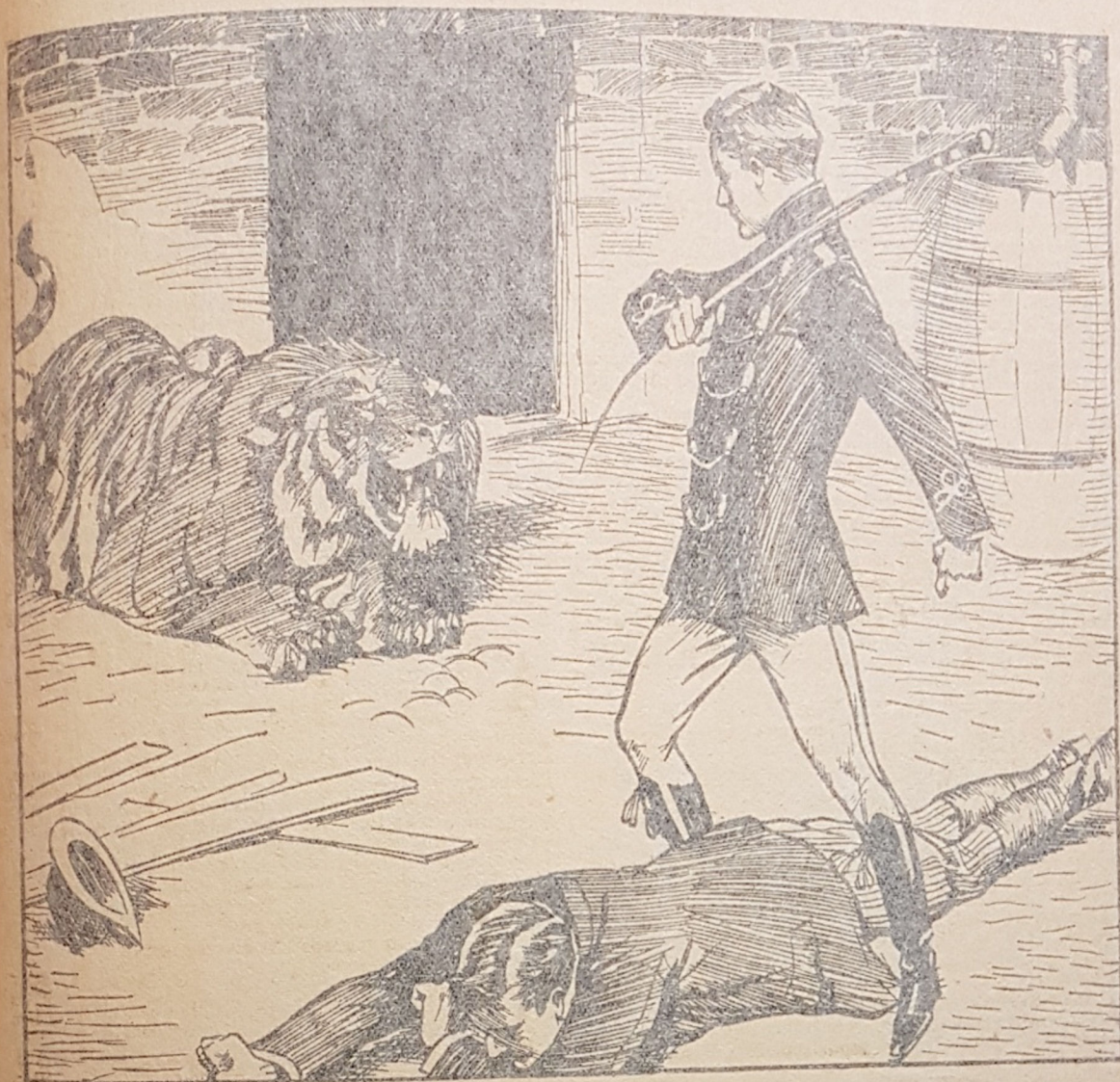
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The tiger was not six feet from his intended victim, when Jack Talbot ran between.

"Another dip!" said Mr. Pye.

"Heave-ho, then, Joey!"

And they heaved.

Deep into the water went the German's head again, and he spluttered and struggled even more furiously than before.

"Ach! Grooh! Gerrooh! Br-r-r-r! Tat you leggo!" he roared.

They plumped him down on the cobblestones, and he sat puffing and blowing, but very perceptibly sobered.

"Ach! You plaggards!" he gasped. "I gets up and trashes you, ain't it?"

"It's all for your good, old man," said Mr. Pye, chuckling. "Don't you want to go through the performance to-night—eh?"

"Ach! I tinks I am ferry vet."

"Then go and get ferry dry."

Jack helped the German to his feet. Herr Biberach blinked dazedly at his kind helpers—Sammy and Mr. Pye. Then he allowed Jack to lead him away.

"Ach! I tinks I am ferry pad this time," he said, as he rubbed himself down with a towel. "Mein head, he schvinn rount and rount!"

"You'll feel better soon, sir."

The German sat down.

"I tinks tat I haiff been trinking too mooch," he said. "Dere vas something to madder mit te visky, too. It vas not goot visky. It got into mein head."

Jack could hardly conceal a smile. The Herr appeared to regard that as a strange circumstance.

"Will you bathe your head again, sir?"

"Nein!" said Herr Biberach, showing unexpected signs of ill-temper. "I vill not bathe mein head! Mein head is all right, ain't it?"

"Yes, sir. As you like."

"I tinks tat Garson say you are interfering buppy. I tinks tat Garson say te troot, ain't it, before?"

Jack was silent.

Hitherto, in his most excited moments, the Herr had always been kind to him, and, in fact, when he was intoxicated, his affection for Jack was overflowing.

Now there was an unexpected change.

"Tat you speak?" exclaimed the Herr, turning an angry glare upon the boy. "I tinks tat you vas interfering buppy!"

"I am sorry, sir."

"I tinks you gets out, ain't it?"

"Can't I help you? I—"

"Dere is te door!"

"But, sir—"

"You gets out, ain't it?" roared the Herr.

Jack hesitated, and then he left the room. He wondered whether the German wished to drink again when he was gone. But the Herr sank into a chair, pressing both hands to his temples.

"Ach! Vat is te madder mit mein head!" he muttered. "I tinks many times, but I not feels dis so like dis before. I tinks tat dere vas something wrong mit te visky."

The Herr searched in a trunk, and took out a large flask. Without troubling about a glass, he began to drink from the flask.

Meanwhile, Jack, depressed and worried, was wondering what he should do. He decided to seek counsel with Joey Pye, and he discovered the clown in the ring, practising some new double somersaults.

Signor Tomsonio was looking on, with a grin upon his fat face.

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"STAUNCH AS STEEL" AND "JUNGLE JACK."

"There, gov'nor," exclaimed Mr. Pye, right-ending himself at last. "Did you ever see anything like that before?"

"Yes, I think so," said the signor calmly. "About a hundred times."

"Look here, gov'nor—"

"Still, it's clever," said Signor Tomsonio. "I'm not denying that you're worth about half what I pay you, Joey."

"I was thinking of a rise."

"You can go on thinking, Joey."

"Rats! Hallo, young 'un, wherefore this pensive brow?"

"Will you come and look at Herr Biberach?" said Jack, in a low voice, not wishing the signor to hear. But the circus master caught a word, and he turned round quickly.

"What's that about Bibby? Has he been at it again?"

"What-ho!" said Mr. Pye.

The signor looked decidedly angry.

"I'm getting fed up with this!" he exclaimed. "I can stand the doc, because he hasn't anything to do in the ring, and his ways don't interfere with business. But if Herr Biberach can't go on to-night, that's an end!"

He cracked his whip to give expression to his feelings.

"I've had enough of it!" he went on angrily. "The public won't stand being disappointed. Twice I've had to make the Herr's turn later because he wasn't fit to go on. If he fails to-night, his contract goes!"

And the signor snapped his fingers.

"I hope he'll be all right, sir," said Jack hurriedly.

"Well, if he isn't, he'll be all wrong!" said the signor oracularly. "Go and look at him, Joey, as you seem to be his dry nurse."

And Joey went out of the tent with Jack. They soon entered the Herr's dressing-room, and they found him stretched on the floor, the flask beside him, the liquor dripping out of it and soaking away.

Mr. Pye raised him up.

"My word, he's done it this time!"

The German opened his eyes and blinked at him.

"Ach! You lets me alone!"

"Rats! I'm going to revive you, you dummy! You'll get the sack if you don't go on to-night!"

"I care not! Let me alone!"

"Rats!"

The German struck out angrily, and Jack had just time to knock his arm aside, or Mr. Pye would have been hurt.

"Tat you goes out!" shouted the Herr.

The clown whistled.

"He ain't so drunk as usual, Jacky!" he muttered.

"There's something wrong with him. I ain't seen him like this before!"

A suspicion had already crept into Jack's mind.

"Is it possible that Carson put anything into the liquor?" he asked. "The Herr says himself there was something wrong with the whisky."

Mr. Pye whistled again, more expressively than before.

"I shouldn't wonder."

The Herr staggered to his feet without assistance. He looked red and angry, and strangely excited. He was muttering to himself in German.

"Tat you gets out!" he said.

"Is that the way you talk to a friend, Bibby?" said Mr. Pye, with an attempt at cheerful good-humour.

"Get out, ain't it?"

The clown shrugged his shoulders.

"I ain't likely to stay where I'm not wanted!" he said.

"P'm off! You can look after yourself, and be hanged!"

And Mr. Pye went out in high dudgeon. The German scowled at Jack.

"Tat you gets out!"

It was useless to remain. Jack followed the clown out, and in the yard he overtook him, and caught his arm.

"Don't go away, Joey."

"I've been ordered out, ain't I?" demanded Mr. Pye.

"Catch me lookin' after the hunks again—not half!"

"He's not himself," said Jack quietly. "He's been in every stage of intoxication before, since I've been here, and every time he was good-tempered. There's something wrong—Carson had given him some drug."

"Well, it looks like it."

"Stand by him, Joey. I don't know what he's going to do, but I don't like the look in his eyes," said Jack, oppressed by a deep uneasiness that he could hardly define himself. "Hark!"

The door of the building they had left clanged shut.

Click!

Joey Pye looked at Jack with a peculiar grin.

"We're locked out, Jacky."

Jack drew a deep breath.

"What is he going to do?"

"Heaven only knows!"

There was a square barred window to the building.

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NEXT

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Jack ran to it; but it was dark inside, and he could see nothing but the vague outlines of the huge tiger.

Clank! Rattle!

"Joey! He's undoing the door of the cage!"

Jack, as the sounds from within the building fell on his ears.

"Phew!"

"Allez!"

It was a shout, and it was followed by the rum of the great shed. Only a locked door was between them and the open yard—and the key in the hand of a man was little short of a madman at that moment.

Joey Pye's teeth chattered.

"Better give the alarm!" he exclaimed.

The mad fool's going to let the tigers loose."

Jack was pale as death. He felt a light touch on his arm and looked round to see Clotilde.

"What is the matter, Jack?"

"Clotilde! Get into your caravan, quick—for my sake!" cried the lad, dragging her forcibly towards the wheeled home.

"But what is it—what has happened?"

"The tigers!"

He could say no more. There was a click of the door and Herr Biberach threw open the big door, and staggered out into the yard. Behind him stalked a form—Julius, the Tiger!

CHAPTER 8.

"The Tiger's Loose!"

"ACH! I think I goes into to tent, ain't it!"

Mr. Pye, his face white as death, caught Jack by the arm.

"Quick—get away!"

"But—"

"Look at the tiger! Come!"

"You go, Joey."

Jack shook himself free. His place was white with danger was. The tiger was loose, and already in front of the circus tent, the people were crowding for admission.

If the tiger should get free from the yard, and get into the open, Jack could guess what would happen. He was in with horror at the thought. But he relied upon his own influence with the tiger.

He ran forwards towards the Herr.

But the German was not himself.

Either his deep drinking had had a new effect upon him, or, as Jack suspected, the Handsome Man had placed some drug in the spirit, and the German was under its evil influence.

He turned savagely upon Jack as the boy ran by.

"Get away!" he shouted, flourishing the long whip.

"Tat you gets out."

"Herr Biberach—"

"Away!"

The Herr slashed with the whip, and the heavy leather thong fell across Jack's shoulders. It was a terrible blow, but he hardly felt the pain.

He ran past the Herr, unheeding, towards the tiger.

"Julius! Julius!"

The German staggered after him.

"Ach! Tat you let mein tiger alone, ain't it?"

Shump, shump, you peast!"

He held out the whip for Julius to jump over. But the tiger did not jump.

He was blinking round, amazed at first by his own freedom, not knowing what to make of it. He was in the bars of the cage, the low walls and buildings of the yard were round him, and a single powerful spring would set him to liberty.

The Herr glared at the tiger, his rage turned upon the animal by its disobedience. The heavy whip rose and circled in the air.

"Stop!" shouted Jack. "Oh, you are mad!"

He knew what the result would be if that blow reached Julius—and it did reach him. The leather thong fell on the broad flanks of the tiger. There was a terrible roar from Julius.

A single blow of his paw sent the German reeling to the ground, and then the tiger sprang into the middle of the yard, growling fiercely.

There were shouts of terror from all sides. It was known all over the circus now that the tiger was loose, and there was a wild stampede for safety.

Signor Tomsonio appeared at the ring entrance of the tent with a gun in his hands, but the gun was shaking and fro like a leaf in the wind.

Joey Pye had promptly climbed to the top of a tree, and was making himself as small as possible there.

The circus hands had dodged over the wall, and were

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themselves in the lofts and sheds, and were palpitating beyond their defences.

In the red glow of the sunset, Julius was master of the eyes yard, standing there emitting savage growls, his red eyes blinking round as if for a victim.

The tigress had not yet emerged from the shed. But she might come out to join her mate at any moment. Her Fibreach lay where he had fallen, utterly overcome by the shock of the tiger's attack and the strong liquor he had consumed.

There was only one, in that terrible moment, to deal with the escaped tiger. It was Jack Talbot.

If he failed, the result would be terrible. From the common could be heard the voices of the people crowding to the arena tent. A spring might land the tiger fairly among them, and then—

Jack knew how much depended on him.

He came towards the tiger again, his eyes fixed upon the terrible brute, and not a sign in his face telling of the sinking of his heart.

"Oh, he'll be killed—he'll be killed!" muttered Joey Pye, from the roof of the caravan—which happened to be Clotilde's. "Go back! Go back!"

The door of the caravan was partly opened.

Clotilde looked out, with a face like death.

"Jack!"

Joey Pye caught a glimpse of the girl's golden hair as she looked out.

"Clotilde! Go in—quick!" he breathed. "Are you mad?"

"Jack is in danger."

"You can't help him."

But the girl did not move. She stood fixed, here eyes upon the terrible scene—of the boy facing the tiger. There was a sudden clatter of hoofs in the yard, and Jim Carson galloped in. He had been for a canter over the common, as was frequently his custom before a performance, and he had come back in utter ignorance of the state of things at the circus.

He dashed into the yard with a clatter, as usual, and muttered an oath as his pony snied in terror.

"You brute! What's the matter with you?"

And his whip cruelly scored the flanks of the pony. But the terror of the animal was too great. He whinnied wildly, and tried to bolt, and the Handsome Man was almost thrown.

He gritted his teeth.

In his rage he lashed and lashed, till a sudden growl from the tiger drew his eyes in that direction.

Then Carson's face turned to stone.

He had not dreamed of this.

He had striven to make the Herr incapable of the performance that evening. He had hoped to ruin Jack's chances of making a hit with the public. He would gladly have seen an accident in the tiger's cage.

But this—

He would have turned his steed and dashed out of the yard again, but his moment of stupified horror had been enough for the pony. The animal reared, and the rider was flung upon the stones of the yard.

With a wild clatter of hoofs the pony dashed away.

Jim Carson lay half-stunned, half-overcome with terror, cowering at the tiger with wild and dilating eyes.

It was a terrible moment for the Handsome Man.

For Julius, excited by the noise and clatter, made a movement towards him, his jaws dripping with foam, his eyes glaring savagely. His motion was creeping—terribly like that of a cat stealing upon a mouse. The tiger had not yet quite gained confidence.

Carson could not move.

He knew, too, that a movement would have caused the huge brute to spring upon him, and pin him to the earth under his fearful claws.

He lay palsied in terror.

In that moment grim death was floating before his eyes—death, the most terrible of all deaths, in the tearing claws of the tiger.

It was well for the Handsome Man that the boy he had so much dreaded and plotted against was there, at that moment when the jaws of death seemed gaping for him.

The tiger was not six feet from his intended victim, when Jack Talbot ran between.

Julius stopped, with a savage growl.

Jack strode straight up to the huge muzzle, the savage jaws, his eyes fixed unflinchingly on those of the tiger.

"Julius!"

The tiger growled.

Jack had picked up the Herr's whip. He cracked it in the air.

"Allez!" he shouted.

Julius hesitated.

But force of habit was too strong.

He jumped over the outstretched whip, in a direction away from the shrinking, palpitating acrobat.

Jack breathed deep with relief.

By persuading Julius into his usual mood, he hoped to get him back to the cage; force was useless against the huge tiger. The whole circus company could not have touched him now that he was free. And the gun in the hands of the signor was likely to hurt anybody but Julius, to judge by the way it was rocking.

"Allez!"

Julius jumped again. Jack patted the huge head, and Julius rubbed his nose against the boy.

Mr. Pye gave a little crow of triumph on top of the caravan.

"Ain't he a nibs?" he murmured. "Didn't I say he was a nibs—a reg'lar nibs? Can't you rely on the original Joey Pye? What!"

"Heaven help him!" murmured Clotilde.

"Heaven helps them as helps themselves," said Mr. Pye sagely. "That's what our Jack is doing. By gum!"

"Allez!"

Julius jumped over the whip once more. This jump brought him nearly to the door of the shed he had left—the building in which stood the tiger's cage, and in which the tigress was standing looking out and blinking into the yard.

If he could only get the tiger inside the doorway and the door closed, Jack asked no more. The terrible peril of shutting himself up in the building with the tigers did not trouble him for a second.

To get them out of the open yard—that was his object. He turned his head a little as he patted Julius, to call to Joey Pye:

"Joey!"

"Wot!"

"Come here!"

"Ow!"

"I want you to close this door after I'm inside."

"I—I'm deaf on that side of my head," murmured the clown; and he made no preparations to leave his safe perch.

"Joey—quick!"

"Ahem! You see—"

"I will come," said Clotilde.

Jack cried out in alarm:

"No, no, no! Go back—go back!"

"I am not afraid." And the girl advanced with steady steps.

"By gum!" said Mr. Pye. "You sha'n't go!" And he came down from the top of the caravan in a double somersault. But Clotilde was already hurrying forward.

Jack said no more. He cracked the whip, and Julius ambled into the shed with the boy's hand on his collar. In the doorway he turned, and blinked into the yard again, as if half-conscious that he was being persuaded out of his freedom.

But it was too late for Julius then. Jack, with a sudden drag on his head, jerked him round, and the next moment the door was shut, and the fastenings clanged outside.

In the dim interior of the building Jack was alone with the tigers, and in the sudden shutting out of the light he could see little of them but two pairs of eyes, glowing like balls of fire in the darkness.

CHAPTER 9.
The Signor Lets Himself Go!

JOEY PYE fastened the door—Clotilde had shut it. Then the fat clown skipped round to the barred window to look in. In the dim interior of the shed he could make out the form of the boy tiger-tamer.

Clotilde was by his side in a moment. She had obeyed Jack's directions to shut him up with the tigers, but it had been with a heart aching with fear for him.

Her face was white as ashes as she looked in. But the danger was now over, or almost so. The tigers could not escape from the building, and Jack was in little more danger than when he was shut up in the cage with them for the rehearsals. The tigress, in fact, was quite amenable to reason. Only Julius, excited by the blow the Herr had given him, and the recent happenings, was in an unruly mood.

Jack soon persuaded the tigress back to the cage. Julius drew into a corner, and crouched there, his eyes blazing in the dimness at his deep throat.

If Jack had faltered then, if his courage had failed him, his mastery of the tigers would have ended there and probably his own life would have ended some of them in that dim shed. For Julius only wanted a **PLUCK—252**

confidence in himself to have become once more the savage beast of the jungle, thirsting for blood.

But Jack did not falter. He advanced upon the tiger, cracking the whip.

"Allez!"

But Julius growled, and did not move.

"Allez!" shouted Jack angrily. And he lightly lashed the tiger.

Julius growled, and rose, and after a doubtful blink at his master, ambled into the cage.

Jack promptly closed the door—promptly, but quietly—and Julius whisked up and down inside the cage, still only half-satisfied with himself for his submission. Jack patted and stroked him through the bars now, and gradually the huge brute was brought to a better temper.

The boy crossed to the door of the shed, and Joey Pye threw it open. As Jack emerged into the yard, Joey threw his arms round his neck, and fairly hugged him.

"Ain't he a nibs?" he crowed. "Didn't I say he was a reg'lar nibs? What!"

"Hang it! Let go!" said Jack.

"Come to my arms, my 'eroic rescuer!" sobbed Joey. "Oh, I could fold him to my buzzum and weep!"

"You're jolly well not going to do anything of the sort!" exclaimed Talbot, laughing. "Don't be an ass, Joey!"

"I'm not being an ass; I'm being grateful and admiring."

"Well, chuck it, then!"

And Mr. Pye "chucked" it.

Signor Tomsonio came up, almost gasping, and wrung Jack's hand.

"I've seen it all, Jack," he said. "Thank goodness you were here! I've seen it all! What do you think of him, Clotilde?"

"He is a hero," said Clotilde softly.

Jack Talbot coloured.

"It's all right," he said; "it's my business to look after the tigers."

"What nerve!" went on the signor. "What pluck! Why this beats anything I've seen in my time! Lucky for Carson you were there, too—oh, Jim?"

Carson was dusting his clothes and scowling. He had quite recovered from his terror, and he was in the bitterest possible temper. Gratitude to the boy who had saved him he could not feel. He only felt a savage rage at being placed under an obligation to one he hated, and a suppressed fury at the utter failure of his scheme, which had turned out in the end to Jack Talbot's benefit.

But even the Handsome Man could not fail to make some acknowledgment that his life had been saved.

"Thank you, Talbot," he said. "It was lucky for me." And he strode away without waiting for a reply.

Jack smiled a little. He understood how Carson was feeling, but as matters had turned out, he could afford to forgive the Handsome Man.

The German's voice broke in. Herr Biberach had come to himself, and he was staggering towards the group, his eyes blazing dizzily.

"Ach! Vere was mein tigers, ain't it?"

The signor turned upon him with a blaze in his eyes.

Joey Pye tapped Clotilde lightly on the arm. The girl looked at him.

"Better mizzle," murmured the clown. "The signor's going to talk pretty."

And Clotilde half smiled, and hurried away. It was time for her to dress for the ring.

Herr Biberach blinked at the signor, and seemed uneasy about meeting his eyes.

"You worm!" said Signor Tomsonio.

"Ach!"

"You crawling apology for an alien! You—your unspeakable sauerkraut-devouring, sausage-munching, beer-wallowing, blithering Dutchman! You ugly, boozy, blinking Dago!"

"Ach!"

"You drunken, reeking, nasty, beastly bounder!" went on the signor, his voice rising crescendo. "You—you—you—"

"Ach!"

"You—you—there ain't a word for you! I can't think of a word in or out of the dictionary to describe you, you—you toad!"

"Ach!"

"Got it, gus'nor!" murmured Mr. Pye. "That's not half what you can do. Tell him something about his ancestors."

"Ach! I tinks I goes in mit mein tigers, ain't it?"

"Then you're tinkin' off the mark," said the signor. "You won't handle tigers again in my show. You won't go into the ring again. Not half!"

"I tinks—"

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NEXT SATURDAY:

"STAUNCH AS STEEL" AND "JUNGLE JACK."

"You'll go and lie down!" said the signor, in disgust. "You wallowing beer-swallower, you can go and guzzle! Fill yourself up to the chin, and the sooner you drown yourself in it the better!"

"Ach! I tinks—"

"The tigers will be cut out of the programme," said the signor. "If the public make a row, I can't help you. You sha'n't go on in my circus again."

"I say, boss—"

"Shut up, Joey!"

"But I've got a suggestion to make."

"No good suggesting that I should let that mad dog go on. He sha'n't ever do a turn again in my circus."

"But—"

"I tell you my mind's made up."

"That's all right, but—"

"Look here, Joey Pye, you stick to wheeze-wangling and sword-swallowing, and tumbling, and don't start wringing your betters."

"Never have," said Mr. Pye; "I was only advising the gus'nor."

"If you're asking for the sack—"

"I'm not—"

"Then you'll jolly well get it without asking for it, you ain't careful. Shut up! It's time you were gagging at the door."

"Yes, but—"

"Nuff said!"

"I was only going to suggest—"

"Bosh!"

"That the tigers should go on all the same—"

"I tell you no!"

"With young Jack instead of the Herr to look after them."

The signor gave a jump.

"My hat! I never thought of that!"

"It takes a chap with brains to think of these things," Mr. Pye remarked, addressing the empty air.

"By George!"

"Think it's a good idea, boss!"

"Could he manage them without Bibby?"

"It looked as if he could just now."

"By Jove! You're right!"

The signor turned to Jack Talbot, whose heart was beating.

"What do you say, Jack? The public will make a fearful row if the tiger turn is cut. Will you risk it?"

"Willingly, sir."

"But can you answer for the tigers?"

"I am sure of it."

"Ach! I tinks—"

"Never mind what you tink. Lay that alien on the straw in the stables, boys, and leave him to sleep it off."

"I tinks tat I not allow—"

"Yes, we'll wait for you to allow!" said the signor, with a snort. "On second thoughts, lock that boozy animal up in a stable where he can't get out to do any more mischief till he's sober."

"I tinks—"

But half a dozen strong hands hurried the German away before he could finish. They did not stand upon ceremony with him. When the evening performance began Herr Biberach was locked up in a stable. He raged at first, but finally went to sleep on a heap of straw, and slept contentedly, with a loud snore that was heard across the yard.

CHAPTER 10.

Facing the Public.

JACK TALBOT'S chance had come! It came, curiously enough, through the schemes of the enemy who had wished to ruin his prospects; but it had come, all the same.

Jack was sorry for the Herr. The unfortunate German had been more sinned against than sinning. But it was evident that Biberach was not in a fit state to go on. He might have played any insane trick in his present state. It was equally certain that the public ought not to be disappointed of a favourite turn if it could be avoided.

Jack, however, had his own ideas on the subject. The signor was already thinking of him to replace the Herr. But Jack had no intention of stepping into the shoes of a man who had been kind to him. That would have been a very ill payment of the care the Herr had taken with his instruction.

But there was no time to discuss that with the signor now. It would be easy enough to make terms if the performance went successfully, and that it should go fully Jack was determined.

He was quite used to the tigers now, and they obeyed

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as promptly as they obeyed their old master. Every trick the Herr could put them through Jack could imitate, and if his nerve did not fail him before an audience, he felt that he could carry it all through successfully.

He had never had a chance of facing an audience before. Among his friends, of course, he had sung songs with perhaps a couple of dozen listeners, but that was very different from standing in the stare of a thousand pairs of eyes, in the bright light of the ring.

Yet he did not, so far, feel anything of stage-fright. He stood at the ring entrance while the earlier part of the performance went on, watching it and watching the people "in front."

The big tent was crammed. Tomsonio's world-famed circus was doing big business now, and the performances were well supported every evening.

Clotilde, on her black Arab, evoked thunders of applause. Jack's eyes watched the girl's graceful figure in the ring, and seldom left it. Clotilde retired at last, and as she rode out of the ring, with a flushed and happy face, she stopped her horse to speak to Jack.

"You are there, Jack?"

He stepped forward.

"Yes, Clotilde."

"You feel confident?"

The boy smiled.

"I don't know! I don't feel afraid."

"I felt afraid at first," said Clotilde. "I remember it—it was years ago, and I was quite a child. But you need not be afraid to face the people, when you are not afraid to face the tigers! And they are good to you. The public are always very good—they take everything good-humouredly!"

"I hope I shall please them, Clotilde."

"I am sure you will!"

The girl passed on, and Jack looked into the ring again. The Handsome Man was receiving breathless cheers as he went through his evolutions on the high trapeze.

Jack Talbot, little as he liked the man, could not help feeling a thrill of admiration for his boundless nerve. The Handsome Man was the king of the trapeze, and he fully deserved the rounds of applause he received.

And now the signor was making an announcement to the audience.

He regretted that an unhappy indisposition prevented Herr Biberach from appearing as usual in the tiger act, but was glad to inform the ladies and gentlemen that the Herr's boy assistant, Jungle Jack, would take his place and give the full show.

The British public is always kind to beginners. The circus audience received the signor's announcement with a good-natured cheer, though probably expecting the Boy Tiger-tamer to fall far short of the Herr's standard.

Then Jack came in.

He looked very handsome in tights and spangles as he walked beside the huge tiger-cage.

The tigers, visible on all sides through the bars of the cage, impressed the audience as usual, and there was a heartier cheer when Jack stepped into the cage, and closed the door behind him.

A thrill ran through the audience. Many of them had seen Herr Biberach do the same thing—but the Herr was a big, strong man, and Jack was but a lad!

They watched him eagerly. Needless to say, the signor watched him eagerly too. He was by no means certain of the success of the experiment.

"He'll do it, boss!" murmured Mr. Pye. "He's a blessed nibe! Didn't I tell you he was a nibe?"

"If he brings it off, bang down he goes on the salary list," said the signor. "I'll give him half the Herr's screw! What?"

"And he'll beat Bibby soon!"

Jack was doing well.

He had felt a flutter at the heart as he came on, and he hardly dared raise his eyes to the white sea of faces.

But the cheer had encouraged him. And when he entered the tiger's cage the old familiar sight and scent of the place made him feel quite his old self.

It was cool as ice, and never had he been so completely the tigers' master. Julius and Julia were as meek as lambs under his voice. They went through every trick amid a daring innovation of his own—by putting his head into the mouth of Julius—the audience were simply frantic.

Signor Tomsonio turned quite pale.

"The young idiot!" he muttered.

But Mr. Pye grinned confidently.

"He's all right, boss!"

And he was all right!

The tigers were taken away at last, but Jack had to

return twice to take his call before the enthusiasm of the audience would suffer him to retire.

Clotilde was waiting for him. She clasped his hand.

"I am so glad, Jack!"

"They seemed to like me, Clotilde!" said the boy, his eyes glistening.

"They did! It was a great success!"

Jack received congratulations from most of the members of the company. Only the Handsome Man held aloof. His heart was black with bitterness. He had helped to work this triumph for the boy he hated, and, with the memory of the saving of his life so recent, he could hardly indulge even a sneer.

Mr. Pye simply hugged Jack when the show was over and he was at liberty. He rubbed off a considerable quantity of paint from his face to Jack's before the lad could escape.

Signor Tomsonio clapped Jack on the shoulder with great elation.

"It was great!" he said. "It was simply great! You'll do!"

"I'm jolly glad, sir!"

"So am I, lad—so am I! You're going on the bills as the Boy Tiger-tamer now and henceforth! What? As for Herr Biberach, I'll give him a pound a week for the use of his tigers! After what's happened, he'll never get a show anywhere else—and he won't perform again for me! What?"

"If you please, sir—"

"Ah, you're thinking of the salary! Well—"

"Oh, no, sir! Not that—not at all!"

"What is it, then?"

"Don't be angry with me, sir, but—"

"Angry!" roared the signor, looking decidedly angry.

"Who's angry? I'm a reasonable man. I'm calm enough. What do you mean? What!"

"If you will listen—"

"Ain't I listening? If this isn't enough to exasperate a man—"

"Oh, do listen to him, dear signor!" said Clotilde softly, laying her little hand on the signor's sleeve. And Dick Thompson calmed down wonderfully.

"Oh, of course I will, chick," he said; "only he's enough to provoke a saint! Haven't I offered him a good job at a good figure? What more does he want?"

"Nothing more, sir," said Jack; "something less. Herr Biberach has been awfully good to me, and taught me all I know about tigers. I couldn't have done anything with them to-night, but for him. I can't take a chap's job away, anyhow—and especially when I learned the trick of it from him. I'm not asking anything for myself. Let the Herr keep on as he was before, with me as his assistant. If you don't want him to appear in the ring, you can arrange that. I can appear as his substitute, and he can pay me what he thinks suitable. I'm sure he'll treat me all right. That's all."

The signor was silent for a moment, looking keenly at Jack.

"Do you know you're giving away a big salary!" he asked.

"I know I ought to stand by the Herr, when he has stood by me."

"Well, settle it as you like with Bibby," said the signor; "only he doesn't show up in the ring again—that's all! Don't worry. You're a good lad—a good lad!"

And the signor shook hands with Jack, and went off to his supper. Clotilde pressed the boy's hand.

"You have done quite right, Jack—quite right; and I'm proud of you!"

And that was enough for Jack!

He was a little uneasy as to how the Herr would act when he heard what had passed. But the next morning Herr Biberach was a soberer, sadder, and wiser man. When he met Jack, he had evidently been having a talk with the signor. He looked white and ill, but he was in his usual kindly temper again.

"Ach!" he said. "I hears from the signor tat you take mein place, ain't it? It is all right, before. You vas peegin' your life, Shack, and I vas nearing to end of mine. You vas not make te mistakes of your friend Bibby, I tink. You vas a good boy, Shack!"

And it was with perfect good-humour that the luckless German saw the name of his pupil take the place of his own on the circus bills—Herr Biberach's name dwindling into small type, and letters a foot high announcing to the public the wonderful performance of Jungle Jack, the Boy Tiger-tamer.

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