

# CIRCUS LUCK!

By  
FRANK RICHARDS



## CHAPTER I

"MOVING on, guvaor?"

"No."

"Sticking to this pitch?"

"Yes."

"We ain't doing much business 'ere."

"I know that."

"The people don't come—"

"I know they don't."

"Well, then, why not move on?" asked Monty Chipmunk, with a puzzled frown. "We struck a bad patch 'ere. Wussn any we've struck for dog's ages. But you got the ole country to choose from, Mr. Pipper, so why not move on afore the circus goes right down and out?"

Mr. Pipper, proprietor of Pipper's Imperial Circus, made no reply to that, beyond a grunt. He was sitting on the step of his van, in the circus camp on a Hampshire common. His plump face was gloomy. Generally Mr. Pipper,

plump and ruddy, was also genial and cheery. Now he looked as if most of the troubles of the universe had settled down on his plump shoulders.

Jack Free looked at him curiously. Like his friend Monty Chipmunk the clown, "Jack of All Trades" was puzzled. Pipper's Imperial had undoubtedly struck a bad patch. Business had been bad—very bad indeed, since the circus had camped on Woodfield Common. Even the "Handsome Man", with his marvellous riding act, seemed to fail for once as a draw. Mr. Chipmunk turned his somersaults and cracked his ancient jokes to a half-empty tent. Jack, like Chip, wondered why the Guvnor did not move on in quest of better fortune. The whole company knew that the circus was losing money day by day; and that, obviously, could not go on for ever.

"There ain't much to be done, guvnor, if we stick 'ere!" went on Chip, persuasively.

"Don't I know it?" snapped Mr. Pipper. "Think I need a wooden-headed, fatheaded, dunderheaded clown to tell me that, Monty Chipmunk? I shouldn't wonder if it was your face that keeps the public away. Or mehbe it's them old wise-cracks that you've cracked agin and agin, till the people in front yawns their heads off, or goes to sleep!"

Chip winked at Jack Free, with the eye furthest from Mr. Pipper, and Jack smiled. Mr. Pipper was in a worried and troubled mood; and if it relieved him to blow off steam at the expense of an old pal, Chip did not mind.

"Fat lot of good you are!" went on Mr. Pipper. "And a fat lot of good that kid is, grinning there like a monkey. What are you grinning at, you Jack? Think it's funny for Pipper's Imperial to go down and out?"

Jack's face became serious at once.

"Fat lot of good any of you are!" continued Mr. Pipper. "Even Handsome don't seem to go down with the natives 'ere. They don't care a bean for El Greco and his lions, and Wad Wadi and his elephants is a drug on the market. And mehbe it's all because you've wored them out with your moth-eaten wheezes that came out of the Ark, Monty Chipmunk!"

"Pile it on, guvnor, if it does you good," said Mr. Chipmunk. "We was going for a walk: but we'll stay and hear all your compliments. Carry on."

Snort, from Mr. Pipper.

"Go for your walk, and be blowed," he said. "Don't trouble to come back, either of you."

"But you ain't told me yet why we don't move on, guvnor. What are we sticking 'ere for, with business going from bad to worse?"

Mr. Pipper gave the clown an exasperated glare.

"You're a fool, Monty Chipmunk—"

"Thanks, guvnor."



"What are you grinning at?"

"And an idjit—"

"Thanks agin."

"And a wooden-headed chump, but even a fatheaded clown with no more brains than a bunny rabbit ought to know that we wouldn't stick on the worst pitch we've ever struck, if we could 'elp it," hooted Mr. Pipper.

"And why can't we 'elp it, guvnor?"

"I'll tell you! Got a hundred pounds in your pocket?"

"I've got ninepence!" sighed Mr. Chipmunk.

"You Jack—you got a hundred pounds in your trousis pocket?"

"Only sixpence, sir," answered Jack.

"Well, then!" snorted Mr. Pipper, "I ain't got much more in mine. And if a hundred pounds don't turn up from somewhere, we're stuck. I've got bills to meet. Praps you've never 'eard of bills to meet? Praps you don't know that when money goes out, and don't come in, the accounts get into the red? I spose a fool of a clown wouldn't know that, or a fool of a kid either. So I'm telling

you. A hundred pounds is wanted afore the circus can take to the road agin, and if it don't turn up, we got to stick 'ere till the bailiffs is put in. Now you know why we ain't moving on, Monty Chipmunk."

Chip gave a low whistle.

"As bad as that, guvnor?" he asked.

"Jest as bad as that, and worse! And now you know, go for your walk, and don't worrit a man that's worried already, blow the pair of you."

"I'm awfully sorry, sir—!" said Jack.

"Fat lot of 'elp that will be!" snorted Mr. Pipper.

"But I say, guvnor—!" began Chip.

"Don't say any more. You've made me tired already."

"If I could do anything—"

"There's one thing you can do, Monty Chipmunk—you can take your face away—if you call it a face. It don't look much like one, to me."

"Praps we'd better go for that walk, Jack!" murmured Mr. Chipmunk, and Jack of All Trades nodded, and they walked away together: Mr. Pipper staring after them with a thunderous brow as they went.

## CHAPTER II

"CIRCUS luck, Jack!" said Mr. Chipmunk, shaking his head. "You 'ave your ups, and you 'ave your downs: and when you 'ave the ups, you feel on top of the world, and when you get the downs, you get the 'ump along with 'em, Jack! And has old Pipper got the regler, blinking, camellious 'ump? I'll say he has!"

Jack made no reply.

The two pals of Pipper's Imperial Circus had stopped, to sit on a stile in a leafy lane, after their walk. Both of them were rather glad to get away from the circus camp for a while, with Mr. Pipper in his present gloomy, pessimistic, exasperated mood. Nobody at Pipper's, in fact, had been looking very cheery, of late. Salaries were in arrears: business was bad, and the outlook uncertain. Chip was not the only member of the circus company who had wondered why the Guvnor did not move on and look for better business elsewhere. Chip and Jack, at least, now knew the reason: and it worried them. Both of them liked old Mr. Pipper, liable as he was to go off the deep end, and hurl uncomplimentary remarks at all and sundry, when he was under the weather. Either of them would have gone to any length to help the circus-master out of his trouble. But neither of them could help.

"If I had a 'undred quid!" went on Chip, with a sigh. "I'd 'and it over to the Guvnor and glad. But 'ave I got a 'undred quid, Jack? I've got ninepence. Ninepence won't see the Guvnor through, Jack! What?"

Still Jack did not answer.

He was looking along the leafy lane, as if interested in some object at a distance, and seemed to have forgotten that Chip was there at all.

Chip gave him a look.

"Mr. Free," he said, with dignity. "I'm a-talking to you! Praps you don't 'ear me? Or praps you think what a clown has to say ain't worth 'earing, Mr. Free!"

"That old duffer—!" exclaimed Jack.

"Eh?" ejaculated Mr. Chipmunk.

"He'll be off that horse any minute."

"What?"

"Look!" exclaimed Jack. "That old boy oughtn't to be riding a fresh horse like that. Look!"

"I was a talking about the Guvnor—"

"Yes, yes, but look at that old boy on that horse! He will have an accident if he doesn't look out."

Jack Free pointed down the lane, and Mr. Chipmunk, at last, turned his attention in that direction. Then his little gnome-like face wrinkled in a grin. What he saw seemed to amuse him.

At a distance, a rider had appeared in sight from another lane. He was a little old gentleman with a fringe of silver hair under his hat. Obviously he had difficulty in managing his horse. It was a fine animal, full of spirit—too full of spirit for the rider, apparently. The old boy, as Jack called him, was riding down the lane towards the stile: but making little progress, for the horse was prancing and curvetting wildly, almost out of control. It looked to Jack as if the animal might bolt, at any moment: in which event the rider was very unlikely to keep his seat, which he had difficulty enough in doing already. And a crash on the hard road would certainly have been a serious matter for a man of his age.

Jack Free had his own troubles, and the Guvnor's troubles, to think of: but he forgot them for the moment, as he watched the prancing horse, and the rider's vain efforts to control it.

"Some rider, what?" grinned Mr. Chipmunk. "That old gent ought to be in a wheelchair, Jack, not in a saddle. My eye! I dessat the gee's been scared by one of them blinking cars whizzing by under his nose! My eye! That would go down as a turn in the ring, Jack." And Mr. Chipmunk chuckled. "Funny, ain't it?"

"It won't be funny, Chip, if he's thrown," said Jack.

"Nor yet it won't!" agreed Chip. "There'll be bones to mend, if he goes down wallop! That old gent should be 'ambling on a quiet old pad-horse, if he wants to ride at all, not on a critter full of beans like that." "Owever, as I was saying—we're on a bad break at the circus, Jack, and it looks as if Pipper's Imperial is goin' to be a back number. I ain't worritin about myself, Jack—a good clown is always worth his money. Nor you needn't worrit a lot, you being a mere kid with all your life before you. But the Guvnor—" Chip shook his head again, sadly. "It's 'ard on the Guvnor, Jack. One of the best that ever was, with all his flying off the 'andle at times. My eye! I almost wish, Mr. Free, that I knew my way into the back door of a bank!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Jack. "Look!"

"I'm a-talking to you, Mr. Free—"

"He's off!"

"If he ain't, he soon will be," said Mr. Chipmunk, glancing down the lane again. "He'll want that wheel-chair presently."

There was a wild clatter of hoofs. The horse, quite out of control now, bolted suddenly. It came towards the stile at a frantic gallop. The reins, lost by the rider, tossed in the air. The old gentleman was still in the saddle, clinging on somehow, but only too evidently in danger of being thrown off headlong at any moment.

"My eye!" said Chip. His face was very serious now. "My eye! He's going! We'll 'ave to 'elp him to the hospital, Jack."

Then Mr. Chipmunk gave a startled yell:

"Jack! Gone mad, boy? Stop! You can't do a thing! Oh, my eye."

Jack did not heed.

As the frantic horse came racing by, the circus boy leaped from the stile, and shot into the road.

Chip watched, almost spell-bound with horror, fully expecting him to go down, trampled under the wild hoofs.

But Jack Free had learned agility, nimbleness, swift cool judgment, as a rider in the circus ring. How he escaped the tossing head, the lashing hoofs, he hardly knew himself. But he did escape them, and his grasp fastened on the tossing reins, and held.

"Jack!" panted Chip.

The reins were in Jack's hands, and he held to them like iron. His feet kicked up a cloud of dust as he was dragged along by the careering horse. But the tossing head was dragged down, and the frantic gallop slowed. For long, long seconds, the circus boy felt as if his arms were being wrenched from his body, and earth and sky and leafy trees seemed to be spinning about him in a mad



*He held on, and the runaway was dragged to a halt*

dance. But he held on—and the runaway, at last, was dragged to a halt.—the little old gentleman still in the saddle, white as a sheet, his eyes popping from a colourless face.

### CHAPTER III

"MY eye!" gasped Chip.  
He came running up.

The horse, trembling now with the reaction after the wild outburst, was quiet enough. Jack held the reins, the horse standing quiet: the little old gentleman staring at Jack, from the saddle, like a man in a dream. Chip came breathlessly up.

"You young hass!" he said.

"It's all right, Chip—"

"I can see that it's all right now, Mr. Free, but you're a young hass all the same! I could see you trampled to death under them blinking 'oofs, and did it give me a turn?"

Jack laughed, breathlessly.

"You can chortle now, you young hass," said Mr. Chipmunk, severely. "But you was as near as a toucher to being trampled to a pancake. You was asking for it."

"I had to help, Chip—"

"Well, okay, as it's turned out," said Chip. "But if I'd knowed what you was going to do, Mr. Free, I'd have had you by the back of the neck. I tell you, you hadn't an earthly."

"Look as if I had," said Jack.

"You ought to be a blinking pancake this very minute. But I'll say I'm glad you ain't," said Chip.

"Thanks," said Jack, laughing.

"Boy!" The little old gentleman in the saddle found his voice. "Boy! You are a brave lad—a very brave lad. You have saved me from a bad fall—very likely saved my life."

"I'm glad I was able to help, sir," said Jack, modestly.

"Hold the horse while I dismount."

"Certainly, sir."

The little old gentleman clambered down from the saddle.

"Give me the reins."

Jack handed them over.

"I shall lead him home! I am much obliged to you, my boy. I shall reward you for this brave action."

"Oh, no, sir!" exclaimed Jack, colouring.

"What? What? I shall certainly do so. Who are you?"

"My name's Jack Free, sir."

"Boy rider in Pipper's Imperial, sir," put in Chip. "Does he get the 'ands when he cavorts round the ring? I'll say he does, and then some. If you ever want to see some good riding, sir, you jest look in at Pipper's Imperial Circus, sir, on the common by Woodfield—"

"Chuck it, Chip," murmured Jack.

"A circus rider!" said the little old gentleman, scanning Jack. "Well, well, I am sure that a reward will be useful to you, my boy."

"No! No! I don't want anything, really, sir," exclaimed Jack, reddening. "Please say no more about it, sir."

"Nonsense! Don't answer back, boy." Boys should not answer back to their elders."



*"That's all right, sir," he said*

"Oh! No, sir! But—"

"I have said that I shall reward you, and I shall certainly do so." With the reins lopped over his arm, the little old gentleman groped in a pocket.

Jack Free stepped back. Certainly, he had saved the little old gentleman from a bad fall, and in all probability saved his life. But equally certainly, he did not want to be rewarded for his services. Chip gave him a comical look.

"Don't you be a young hass!" he whispered.

"Come on, Chip—time we got back to camp," said Jack.

"Stop, please!" rapped out the old gentleman. He was going through pocket after pocket. "Good gad! I must have forgotten my wallet. I have nothing on me, boy."

Jack Free was glad to hear it.

"That's all right, sir," he said.

"It is not all right! Stop!"

"Old on, Mr. Free, when your elders is a-talking to you," said Chip.

"I am Colonel Ponsonby, of Ponsonby Hall, near Woodfield," said the little old gentleman. "Come up to the Hall later, boy, and I shall then reward you suitably for what you have done."

"But, sir—"

"I shall expect to see you—"

"But—"

"That is all!" said Colonel Ponsonby: and he walked the horse up the lane, with that, and departed.

Jack smiled.

"That's that!" he said. "May as well walk back to camp now, Chip."

"You'll be going up to the 'all?" said Chip.

"No fear."

"Look 'ere, young Jack, it might be a fiver—or even a tenner!" said Chip, impressively. "You could see that old gent was caked with oof, from the look of him and his gee. Who the dickens are you to turn up your nose at a fiver?"

"I'm not turning up my nose at it, Chip: but I don't want it, and won't have it," answered Jack. "I'm not going anywhere near Ponsonby Hall. I suppose a chap can lend an old man a hand without wanting to be paid for it."

"You're a young hass, Jack."

"You've said that before, Chip! You're repeating yourself, old man."

"I'm tell you that that old gent looked good for a fiver—"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Mebbe a tenner—!"

"Quite possible! Well, I don't want his fivers or his tenners," said Jack. "Come on, Chip, or we shall be late back for grub."

"If I wasn't the best-tempered covey on the road," said Chip, "I'd smack your silly 'ead, Mr. Froe."

"Then I'm glad you're the best-tempered covey on the road, Chip," said Jack, laughing. "Look here, Chip, I don't want that old boy's fiver, and I'm not going anywhere near Ponsonby Hall: so chuck it, and come along."

Chip grunted, and came along.

#### CHAPTER IV

"I'M sorry, Mr. Pipper—"

"Don't bother."

"But—!"

"Did I say don't bother, young Jack, or did I not say don't bother!" hooted Mr. Pipper. "Praps I don't speak plain? Praps you've gone deaf? Or praps you fancy you can cheek your boss because he's down on his luck! What?"

Mr. Pipper's voice, never very subdued, was rather like a trumpet. When the Guvnor was in one of his tantrums, he was wont to put on steam. And Mr. Pipper undoubtedly was in a tantrum now. His voice could be heard far and wide. Jack Free coloured uncomfortably. He did not mind getting the rough edge of Mr. Pipper's tongue, if that afforded Mr. Pipper any relief in a time of trouble; but at the moment he would have preferred to give the Guvnor a wide berth. But he had to speak to him.

It was close on time for the evening show. Chip, in his clown's attire, with his queer little face daubed, and a conical hat on his head, was at the door of the big tent, thumping a drum, and calling on the public generally to "walk up". But there did not seem to be much of a public for circus shows in the neighbourhood of Woodfield, and it was a sparse audience that trickled in. Which, no doubt, added to Mr. Pipper's ire. Pipper's Imperial was doing poor business, and it did not look like improving. When takings did not come up to running expenses, it was a dim outlook for everyone.

Mr. Pipper, in his silk hat and gorgeous waistcoat, his whip under his arm, was about to go in by the staff entrance, when Jack intervened. Mr. Pipper had always been kindness itself to the wandering boy who had been taken on in the circus. But all the milk of human kindness seemed to have exuded from him now. He glared at Jack.

"If you please, sir—!" faltered Jack.

"I don't please!" interrupted Mr. Pipper. "Get out."

"Do listen a minute, sir—"

"I said get out! You waiting for me to lay this 'ere whip round you?" demanded Mr. Pipper.

"I can't ride this evening," blurted out Jack. "I—I'm sorry, but—but through something that happened this afternoon, I'm stiff all over, and I couldn't ride even a pad-horse, sir, let alone go over the banners and through the hoops. I'm very sorry sir—"

"Blue blazes!" ejaculated Mr. Pipper. "You going off work because your salary ain't been paid for a week? Is that it?"

Jack crimsoned.

"No! No! No!" he exclaimed. "You couldn't think that of me, Mr. Pipper. After all your kindness to me—"

"After all my kindness to you, you're going to let me down, what?"

"No! No! But—but—"

"And what's 'appened to knock you out?" snorted Mr. Pipper. "You went out for a walk with Chip. Tired you out, what? You a delicate little flower that can't walk a mile without getting wore out?"

"My arms are too stiff to hold the reins—"



*"If you please, sir—!" faltered Jack*

"And for why? What have you been up to, I'd like to know?"

"I stopped a runaway horse in the lanes—"

"Blue blazes!" roared Mr. Pipper. "And can't you stop a runaway horse, and you a circus rider, without becoming a hospital case? Made of putty?"

"It wasn't easy—"

"You like things easy, what? You joined a circus for an easy life, did you? You wanted a feather bed, and a nurse to tuck you up o' nights, what? Champagne and oysters, praps—or mebbe you'd prefer caviare? And a nice easy armchair to sit in, and a footstool for your poor little feet?"

"I—I had to stop that horse, sir—"

"Oh! You had to, had you? Are you paid to ride in my ring, or are you paid to walk about Hampshire stopping runaway horses?"

"The rider was in danger—"

"Was he?" snorted Mr. Pipper. "If he couldn't ride, what was he doing

on a 'orse? Your special business to look after coves who get on 'orses and can't ride 'em?"

Poor Jack stood silent, his face burning. He had hardly noticed it, in the excitement of the tussle with old Colonel Ponsonby's horse: but the strain on his arms had been a terrible one. They ached from shoulder to wrist. For the pain itself he cared little: he was hardy and strong, and could stand it. But until he pulled round, he could not carry on with his circus act. To ride in the ring was simply to fall into the tan.

"So you're cutting out your act, are you?" went on Mr. Pipper, as he did not speak. "Well, it ain't much of an act—you don't fancy you're a draw like Handsome, do you?"

"No, no, of course not—"

"Think the people in front will miss you, and weep briny tears?" Mr. Pipper was sarcastic. "Think they'll ask for their money back, because you ain't in the ring? That the big idea?" Mr. Pipper snorted. "Well, stand out if you like, and take it from me that you won't be missed, and that nobody will notice whether you're there or not! Got that, young Jack?"

"Yes, sir!" faltered Jack.

"And get this, too," said Mr. Pipper. "You ain't much use, and you ain't much ornymint, but you got your job to do in this 'ere circus, s'long as you're on the pay-roll, and if you're a-throwing it in my face that you ain't been paid reglar—"

"Oh! No! No! I—"

"If that's it, what's keeping you 'ere?" hooted Mr. Pipper. "It's a sinking ship, and rats runs away from a sinking ship. And the sooner you do it, the better. You're sacked."

"Oh, sir—!"

"Don't 'oh, sir' me! You're sacked! Praps you'll tell me next that you ain't going without your pay? Well, I ain't so far on the rocks that I can't cough up a pound or two. You come to my van arter the show, and you'll be paid, if that's what's worriting you."

"It isn't! I—"

"You'll be paid, and you'll go! You're sacked! Now get out of my way, if you don't want this 'ere whip round your legs."

Jack stepped aside, and the circus master, with a final glare, stamped into the tent. Only too clearly, Mr. Pipper's financial difficulties had told on his temper, and he was not in a reasonable mood. Jack's request to be let off the evening show had come as a last straw, as it were, on the top of everything else, and Mr. Pipper had exploded rather like a bomb. Jack had had the full benefit of it. He did not feel resentment for the Guvnor's hard words: he



*"You ain't much use, and you ain't much ornament . . ."*

owed Mr. Pipper too much for past kindnesses for that. But he was feeling utterly miserable as he walked away—sacked.

#### CHAPTER V

"O W's the fins?" asked Chip.

The performance was over. The last blare from the big tent had died away. The sparse audience that had trickled in, had trickled out. Mr. Pipper had gone to his van, with a gloomy brow, doubtless to wrestle there with his financial problems. Jack Free was sitting in the doorway of the little tent he shared with Chip, looking out over the grassy common, bright in the light of a full round moon. His face was overcast; but he tried to smile, as Mr. Chipmonk came along and addressed him.

"Okay, Chip," he answered. "Much better."

"You've rubbed 'em with that stuff I give you?"

"Yes, lots of times. They don't ache so much now. I—I wish I could have put on my act, Chip. But I—I couldn't."

"Of course you couldn't, you young idjit," said Mr. Chipmunk. "And don't you mind the Guvnor blowing off steam—."

"You heard him?" asked Jack.

Mr. Chipmunk grinned.

"If everybody between Bristol one way, and London the other, didn't 'ear him, there must be a lot of deafness about," he said. "Yes, I 'eard him, young Jack! Don't you mind his temper—he's got a lot of trouble on 'and—."

"I don't!" said Jack. "But—."

"You'll be all right to-morrer—."

"There won't be any to-morrer here for me, Chip. I'm sacked."

Chip shook his head.

"That was only a spot of steam," he said. "I couldn't count how many times the Guvnor's sacked me, when his steam was up. But he always comes round. Why, bless your little 'eart, the Guvnor never sacks nobody. He keeps a man on, good times or bad, and between you and me, young Jack, that's one reason why he's hit a bad spot. Too generous, the old Guvnor."

"He's a good sort," said Jack. "I don't care if he blows off steam at me, Chip: not the least little bit in the world. I don't think he meant what he said, either—it was only that he's out of sorts. He knows I wouldn't let him down if I could help it. But—."

"Forget it," said Chip.

"I can't forget that I'm sacked, Chip. Mr. Pipper told me to go to his van for my money after the show. I'd rather slip away quietly without seeing him again—."

"You try it on, and I'll lug you back by the blinking ears, Mr. Free," said Chip, emphatically. "Don't you get your back up with the old Guvnor, Jack, or you and me is going to 'ave a row."

"I haven't, Chip! Not in the least. I'd just love to help him if I could," said Jack. "And it would help him a little, if only a little, to cut down the salary-list—even my little bit."

"If that's the idea, forget it!" grunted Chip. "You're worth your money 'ere, Jack, even if you do 'ave to cut a turn now and then owing to your fancy for stopping runaway 'orses and saving silly old gents from a-breakin' of their silly old necks! Jest forget it."

Jack sat silent, his face clouded.

"Come along to the mess-tent, kid," said Chip. "I feel like 'aving some supper, arter performing to the crowned 'eads of 'ampshire. 'Ere, what may you 'appen to want, Fred?"



*"I am Colonel Ponsonby's valet"*

Fred, the stableman, came up. He was followed by a plump man dressed in dark clothes: a stranger to Jack and Chip.

"This 'ere gent is asking to see Mr. Free," answered Fred. "That'll be young Jack, I s'pose."

"Well, 'ere's young Jack, if he's wanted," said Chip.

"'Ere you are, sir!" said Fred, and he departed, leaving the plump man eyeing Jack curiously. Jack eyed him in return, wondering what a stranger could want with him.

"You are Mr. Free?" asked the plump man.

"I'm Jack Free," answered Jack, with a smile.

"Then you are the boy who stopped my master's horse this afternoon, and, I understand, saved him from a fall."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jack. "Yes! But what—?"

"I am Colonel Ponsonby's valet. He has sent me to bring this letter to you."

The plump man fished an envelope out of his pocket. He held it out to the circus boy. Jack took it from his hand.

"There is no answer!" added the plump man, and with that he turned and walked away.

Jack was left staring at the envelope in his hand.

Chip chuckled.

"No use saying no to that old gent, Jack," he said. "I shouldn't wonder if he's coughed up that fiver, in that wallop. Open it and see."

"I hope not," said Jack. "I can't take a reward for what I did."

"If there's a fiver in that there wallop, Jack, and you don't want it, you can 'and it over to yours truly!" said Chip. "I got a use for fivers. But praps its only a letter of thanks or something of that sort. Anyhow, you won't know what's in it by staring at it."

Jack slit the envelope.

He drew out a folded letter, and as he unfolded it, a slip of engraved paper came to light, folded. Chip gave a whoop.

"What did I tell you, young Jack?" he trilled. "Didn't I tell you that old gent was caked with oof, and wasn't his silly old neck worth a fiver to him? But what does he say?"

With the folded banknote in one hand, Jack held up the letter in the other, and they read it together by the bright moonlight.

To Jack Froo.

As you have not called here, as I requested, I am sending you this letter by hand. I quite understand that you do not desire to be rewarded for the great service you rendered me, and I respect your independence. Nevertheless, I insist upon your accepting the enclosed banknote, and shall be very seriously offended if you make any further demur. It does not diminish the gratitude I feel for the brave and generous act in coming to the help of an old man at the risk of your life.

Gilbert Ponsonby.

"Well, blow me up a gum-tree!" said Chip. "Put very nicely, I must say, though a bit as if the old gent had swallered a dictionary. You jest can't chuck his fiver back at him, Mr. Froo."

"But, Chip—"

"But me no buts!" interrupted Mr. Chipmunk. "Want to seriously offend sich a nice old gent?"

"No! But—"

"You got to chew on it, young Jack." Chip chuckled again. "Tain't every circus kid that has a fiver to chew on, neither."

"I know! But—"

"There must have been billygoats in your family, the way you keep on butting," said Chip. "I tell you, you got to stand for it."

Jack nodded slowly.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said. "But—"

"There you go again—but—but—but! Chuck butting, and let's see that banknote—might be a tenner, for all we know! If it's a tenner you're standing me beer, Mr. Free! Let's look at it."

Jack unfolded the banknote.

He glanced at it—and jumped!

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Tenner?" asked Chip. "Golly! I wish I was an old gent with tenners to chuck about, though I wouldn't like to ride like 'im! Is it a tenner?"

"No!" gasped Jack.

"Then what the dickens is it?"

"It—it—it—it's a hundred—!"

Mr. Chipmunk jumped clear of the ground.

"A hundred!" he bawled.

Jack held up the banknote. The moonlight shone on it. Mr. Chipmunk gazed at it with almost unbelieving eyes.

"A 'undred!" he stuttered. "Oh, my only 'at with pink flowers! A 'undred! Oh, my beloved aunt Sempronia! Let me look at it, Jack—it does me good to look at it! A 'undred! A 'undred quids! We ain't dreaming this 'ere, is we, Jack?"

Jack laughed.

"No! It's real—though it doesn't seem real!" he said. "I'm not going to offend the old boy by sending it back, Chip—I couldn't, when the Guvnor's in such a spot!"

"The Guvnor!" repeated Chip, blankly. "What's the Guvnor got to do with it?"

"Guess!" said Jack, laughing. "See you later, Chip!"

"But look 'ere—"

But Jack Free did not "look there". He was running for Mr. Pipper's van, leaving Chip staring after him as he ran.

## CHAPTER VI

"YOU!"

"Yes, sir! I—"

"You can step in," Mr. Pipper's voice was quiet and subdued. He smiled

faintly at Jack Free. "Don't be afeared, kid—I ain't going to blow your 'ead off! Jest step in."

Jack stepped into the Guvnor's van.

Mr. Pipper was sitting on his bunk. He had an unlighted cigar in his teeth. On a little trestle table before him were sheets of paper covered with figures. He had a pen in his hand, a spot of ink on his plump nose, and several more on his plump fingers. Apparently Mr. Pipper had been going through accounts, and was still so occupied when Jack Free tapped at the van door and looked in, with a bright and eager face.

Mr. Pipper was no longer in a state of "tantrums". He had a tired and weary look that went straight to the boy's heart. Clearly he had found nothing inspiring in those accounts. He looked, in fact, as he felt—down and out! Pipper's Imperial had often weathered rough times, and pulled through; but this time Mr. Pipper saw no way through. There was not a glimmer of ill-humour about him now. He was only worn and weary.

"I've come, sir—!" began Jack.

"Yup, I told you to come for your money," said Mr. Pipper. "I got it for you, young Jack; that's okay. I said you was sacked—."

"I hope you didn't mean it, sir."

"No more I did, really," said Mr. Pipper. "Jest blowing off steam because everything's at sixes and sevens, and a man's worried, and I'm an ol' fool, I dessay. But you may as well call it the sack, kid, for you'll 'ave to go, and every man 'ere will 'ave to go—and Pipper's Imperial won't be seen on the roads no more. There's been bad times and good times, but I've always 'eld the ol' show together, till now! Now—," Mr. Pipper heaved a deep sigh. "Now the luck's run out to the last drop, and it's the finish."

"But, sir—"

"You're a 'andy lad, Jack, and willing to work, and you'll find something afore long," said Mr. Pipper. "Mebbe old Chip will find a market for his old wheezes, too. I 'ope so. I'm sorry, Jack, that I gave you the rough edge of my tongue. Praps you know that I never meant a word of it. But I'm sorry I let off like that. I'd like you to remember me as a good boss, when the circus is sold up and we're on different roads."

"I shall always remember your kindness to me, sir, taking me in off the road as you did," said Jack. "But—"

"Well, that's the lot," said Mr. Pipper, "and 'ere's what's doo to you—"

"I didn't come here for that, sir."

"Well, it's yours, anyways, so take it, kid, and good-bye."

"It's not good-bye, sir, if you mean that I'm not sacked after all," said

Jack. "This morning, sir, you told Chip that a hundred pounds would pull you through."

"What about it?"

"I—I want to help—."

"I know you would, Jack, if you could; and if you could find a 'undred pounds a-growing on one of these 'ere Hampshire trees, I'd thank you to catch it in your 'at, and lend it to me!" said Mr. Pipper, with a ghost of a grin. "But you can't 'elp, young Jack—the game's up for Pipper's Imperial, and I got to chew on it."

"Look!" said Jack.

He held up the banknote.

"Eh! What's that?" ejaculated Mr. Pipper.

"It's a banknote for a hundred pounds," said Jack. "I didn't find it growing on a tree, Mr. Pipper—it was sent to me by the old boy whose horse I stopped this morning in the lanes, and—and it's yours, sir."

"I'm dreaming this!" said Mr. Pipper.

Jack laid the banknote on the table, among the many papers. Mr. Pipper blinked at it, and then at the boy.

"A 'undred pounds!" said Mr. Pipper, like a man in a dream. "With a 'undred pounds I could clear up and get on the road again, like I told Chip. And the kid whose 'ead I was a-biting off, walks into my van with a 'undred-pound banknote, and he says, says he, it's yours, says he. You better wake me up, young Jack, me being fast asleep and dreaming."

Jack laughed.

A chuckle was heard at the door, and Chip's little gnome-like face looked into the van.

"You ain't dreaming, guvnor," said Chip. "It's the real goods, guvnor, though you could 'ave knocked me down with a ten-ton lorry when I seed that banknote. Did I tell you, guvnor, when young Jack joined the circus, that he was a mascot? Did I or did I not?"

"You did, Chip!" gasped Mr. Pipper. "And me a-jawing of him for getting crooked stopping a runaway 'orse, and then this a-coming of it!" Mr. Pipper picked up the banknote, and fingered it lovingly. "If you mean this, young Jack—?"

"Of course," said Jack.

"After I was a-biting of your 'ead off—."

"That doesn't matter," said Jack. "You can bite if off again, if it makes you feel better, sir."

"I could jest kick myself," said Mr. Pipper.

"I'll do it for you, if you like, guvnor," said Chip.



*"You ain't dreaming, Guvnor," said Chip*

"You 'old your row, you old clown," said Mr. Pipper. "Jack, you're to lend me this 'ere banknote, and I'm going to square later when the tide turns: and then I'll make you put it in the bank, and keep it by for a rainy day. Rainy days comes to circus folk! But there's sunny ones, too; and Pipper's Imperial is going to see some of 'em. Now get out while I go through these 'ere accounts again, what has been making my poor old 'ead ache—but they won't make it ache no more!"

Chip pressed Jack's arm, as they walked away from the Guvnor's van.

"Who'd have thought it?" he said.

"Who indeed!" agreed Jack.

"But it's 'appened," said Mr. Chipmunk. "You never knows your luck, Mr. Free. Specially in circus life you never knows your luck. You stops an old gent's 'orse, and saves his silly old neck for him, never dreaming of making as much as a thrippenny bit out of it; and lo and behold, it turns out that you've saved Pipper's Imperial from going to pot. There's ups and downs in circus life, Mr. Free, like I've told you before: and by gum, this is one of the

ups—right up, Mr. Free, up like a blinking Sputnik. It's circus luck, young Jack—jest circus luck!"

"Jolly good luck, anyway," said Jack.

"And then some," said Mr. Chipmunk, "and if I hadn't spent that ninepence I had this afternoon, I'd stand myself an extra beer, jest to celebrate. Which I'll do jest the same, Mr. Free, if you'll lend me that sixpence of yours."

Jack laughed and handed over the sixpence.

THE END