

**The Second Long
Story.
Complete in this
Issue.**



**A Tale of the Ring,
dealing with
Jack Talbot and
his chum Clotilde.**



JUNGLE JACK.

By HARRY DORRAIN.

CHAPTER 1.

Joey Pye's Little Joke.

JUNGLE JACK!

"The Boy Tiger Tamer!

"The Wonder of the Age!

JUNGLE JACK!

"Tomsonio's World-Famous Circus and Hippodrome, To-Night!"

The announcement flared forth in big type from the posters—one of the hundreds that were adorning the hoardings and dead walls of Milthorpe town.

A handsome, well-built lad of about fifteen stopped as he passed the big wooden hoarding, and the flaring type caught his eye. He ran his glance over the poster with a quiet smile.

His companion, a man a good deal older than himself, with a curiously droll cast of countenance, chuckled as he read the announcement.

"There you are again, Jackie!"

Jack Talbot laughed. It was still a novelty to him to see his name in print, and there was an irresistible charm in it.

Only a few weeks before he had left the National School at Abbotsdale, without the faintest idea that he would ever be a performer in a circus company.

Good luck and his own courage had helped him on; and now, scarce a month from the time when he had entered Signor Tomsonio's circus as a horse-boy, he was announced as prominently as any member of the company. Even Jim Carson, the acrobat, formerly considered the chief draw of the circus—at least by himself—was not given any more "biscuit" than the new attraction.

"Jungle Jack" as a title was the outcome of the fertile fancy of Joey Pye, the clown, his present companion in this stroll through Milthorpe. Jack Talbot had never seen a jungle, nor was he likely to do so; but "Jungle Jack" sounded very well for the Boy Tiger Tamer.

"That's the tenth we've passed," continued Joey Pye—Joseph Montgomery Pye, to give him his full name, which nobody ever did. "You ought to be getting a swelled head by this time, Jackie."

"That's not likely, Joe. I've been jolly lucky."

"You have, my boy, you have," agreed Mr. Pye. "You owe a great deal to your friends—eh?"

"I do, sincerely," said Jack. "It was through you—"

"Stuff! I was only joking."

"I know you were; but it's a fact. Herr Biberach

wouldn't have taken me on to help him with the tigers if you hadn't spoken for me."

"You owe it all to your own pluck, Jackie, and that's the solid truth. There's not a man in the circus who'd dare do what you do with the tigers—excepting myself, of course. I'm as bold as a lion—outside the cage for preference."

Jack laughed, and glanced at the poster again. Milthorpe was alive with them. When Tomsonio's circus invaded a town, the signor left nothing to chance. If the people did not roll up in their hundreds, it would not be for want of being told exactly what attractions the world-famous circus had to offer.

The list of attractions was a long one, and one of the chief items was the tiger act by Jungle Jack. "Next in importance came the acrobatic feats of Jim Carson, the Handsome Man, as he was called, and the riding of Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring. But the list was a long one."

A number of Milthorpe natives were gathered before the big poster as Jack Talbot and Joey Pye stopped to look at it. They were reading down the poster, and passing comments on it, and the circus chums listened with great interest. Jack and Joey, of course, were in everyday clothes, and not in the least recognisable as circus performers, unless the traces of grease paint round Joey's ears might have given him away.

A red-faced man in tweed clothes of a decidedly loud cut was passing a running commentary of remarks upon the circus poster, and he was listened to with considerable respect by the gathering of curious ones.

"It's all spoo!" said the red-faced gentleman, with the air of an oracle. "Boy Tiger Tamer! Huh! He's thirty if he's a day."

Jack Talbot started, and smiled at Joey Pye.

"You've seen him, Master 'Opkins?" said one of the crowd.

"Seen him! I should say so."

"In the circus?"

"Ay, and out of it, scores of times," said the veracious Mr. Hopkins. "He's as old as you or me, any day in the week."

"Them posters is mostly lies, I 'spose."

"All spoo!, my boy," said Mr. Hopkins, with a wave of the hand—"all spoo!. Boy Tiger Tamer! He won't see thirty again."

"The gentleman's right," said Mr. Pye, who never could resist a joke. "I've seen him too."

PLUCK.—253.

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Mr. Hopkins gave a slight start.

"Oh, you've seen him!" said he suspiciously.

"I have," said Joey; "I was brought up with him. He was like an elder brother to me, he was. I regarded him in the light of a second father."

Jack almost gasped. Joey Pye spoke with a perfect seriousness that duly impressed the crowd. Mr. Hopkins, pleased with this weight of testimony on his side, grinned in a superior way.

"They're all the same," he said—"all spoof."

"That's the word," said Joey—"spoof! If you saw the Boy Tiger Tamer when he had a week's beard on, you'd think he was a boy—I don't think. Why, he's spent twenty years, if he's spent a day, in the Indian jungles."

"There you are!" said Mr. Hopkins. "All spoof."

"It's wonderful how he makes up as a boy," said Joey.

"You'd never imagine he was fifty-five, to look at him."

"Fifty-five!" said Mr. Hopkins.

"Of course, he wouldn't take you in, sir," said Joey deferentially. "You're one of those keen chaps who can't be taken in."

"I am so!" said Mr. Hopkins. "You can't pull the wool over my eyes."

"Course not, I—Hullo, Sammy!"

Samson, the Strong Man of the circus, came by, and he stopped to speak to Joey Pye. He wagged a black pipe at the mirth merchant of Tomsonio's Circus.

"You're wanted at the circus, Joey," he said.

"Cheese it! I—"

"Signor Tomsonio has been asking for you, and he said some things when I told him you were gone for a stroll. You've got to rehearse the new act, you fat bounder."

"It's a dog's life," said Mr. Pye pathetically. "Work, work every day, and salary to be drawn only once a week."

"Well, it's a week's salary, isn't it?" said Sammy.

"Oh, don't argue! I suppose we'd better stroll in, Jackie."

"I suppose so," said Jack, laughing.

The little knot of people before the poster were staring at the three of them in surprise and interest.

"Do you 'appen to belong to the circus?" asked Mr. Hopkins.

Joey Pye chuckled.

"Some," he replied.

"Oh! What might your name be?"

"Plantagenet Sardanapalus de Smythe."

Mr. Hopkins stared.

"You don't mean to say that's your name, sir!"

"Not a bit of it. It might be, you see. You asked me what my name might be, and I told you," said Mr. Pye cheerfully. "As a matter of fact, it's Pye—Joseph Montgomery Pye—shortened to Joey for common use. This gentleman is Samson, the Strong Man, who can break cocoanut-ice with his teeth, snap pack-thread with his biceps, and carry milk-chocolate piled on his head."

Mr. Hopkins looked at Joey, and then at the sturdy Strong Man, with a decidedly puzzled expression. Sammy gave vent to a deep chuckle like the rumble of a distant express.

"And who's the young gent?" asked Mr. Hopkins, at last.

"Ahem—that's—"

"That's Jungle Jack," said Sammy, who did not know the cause of Mr. Pye's hesitation, "the Boy Tiger Tamer."

Mr. Hopkins nearly collapsed.

"The—the—the Boy Tiger Tamer?" he stammered.

"Yes."

Jack Talbot laughed aloud. The utter discomfiture of Mr. Hopkins was too funny, after the close acquaintance with his appearance that the wisacre of Milthorpe had been claiming.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Joey Pye.

The crowd echoed the chuckle, and Mr. Hopkins, looking decidedly small, made a hurried retreat. The three friends of the circus strolled away together, Joey Pye in the middle, linking arms with Sammy and Jack. Some of the curious crowd followed them at a distance to the circus camp on the outskirts of the town.

"Let that be a lesson to you, Sammy," said Mr. Pye, who was rather given to assuming parental airs towards his Herculean friend. "Don't ever gas or talk out of your hat, or you may get shown up in the most unexpected way."

"What are you talking about?" asked the Strong Man.

"That duffer was claiming to know all about Jack, and to know that he was over thirty years old," chuckled Mr. Pye.

The Strong Man chuckled too.

"Hullo," exclaimed Jack, "there's a row on! Listen!"

There was the sound of a voice raised in anger as they approached the circus.

"That's the signor's toot," chuckled Mr. Pye. "Come on!"

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CHAPTER 2.

An Old Enemy.

SIGNOR TOMSONIO was seated upon the shaft of a waggon. His round, red face was redder than usual with excitement, and his silk hat was tilted back most rakishly on his curly, well-oiled locks. His fancy waistcoat glowed with all the colours of the rainbow. In the ring and out of the ring, Signor Tomsonio was much given to gorgeous waistcoats.

A man in rough garb, with a sullen face, stood before him, listening to the far from polite remarks the signor was making.

"Take you on again!" said Signor Tomsonio. "What do you take me for?"

The man made no reply.

"Look you here, Dave Tuttle," went on the signor, "why did I sack you?"

The man grunted.

"I sacked you because you tried to rob Miss Clotilde—you and another rascal—and she never had anything but a word of kindness for even a rascal like you," said the signor. "I kicked you out, instead of having you arrested. Now you've got the cheek to ask me to take you on again."

"I was drunk."

"Well, that's a jolly good recommendation, I must say," snorted the signor. "Besides, you weren't. You were a scoundrel, drunk or sober."

"I—I—"

"Oh, don't jabber at me with your I—I—I, like a durned monkey!" said the signor. "I gave you the order of the boot. That's settled."

"I can't get work."

"You should have thought of that before you turned thief and footpad while you had a good job."

"Do you want a man to starve?"

"I've filled your place."

Tuttle snapped his teeth venomously.

"Yes, I know, that brat from Abbotsdale—Jack Talbot."

The signor frowned darkly.

"I gave Jack Talbot your place," he said. "But he soon found something better to do. I've taken on a stable-hand in the place now that Talbot is with the tigers. You couldn't come back, even if the place was open. I'll have no thief in my show."

"Hang you!" said Tuttle, between his teeth. "I'll be even with the lot of you yet!"

The signor laughed grimly.

"Ah! Now you're coming out into the open, are you?" he said. "No more fair words, if you can't get the berth."

Tuttle gritted his teeth. The signor rose to his feet as a slim, graceful girl in a white dress came towards the spot. It was Clotilde, the girl rider.

"Get off the ground," he said. "Clear off! It's all right, Clotilde, it's only that brute Tuttle come back to beg for his job again."

The girl's face softened as she looked at the man. Ruffian as he was, ungrateful brute as he had proved himself, her eyes read signs of want in his appearance, and she pitied him.

Tuttle, too, read something in her look, and he turned towards her.

"Speak a word for me, Miss Clotilde!" he exclaimed.

"I've been tramping for work, and I can't find any. Say a word to the signor for me. He's very hard."

"Hard!" exclaimed Signor Tomsonio. "Hard—to turn out a thief!"

"Signor"—Clotilde's voice was very soft—"couldn't you forgive him?"

Signor Tomsonio stared at her.

"Clotilde! He tried to rob you?"

"I—I know. But—"

"He's a dangerous ruffian."

"He is in want."

"Serve him right. He'll be more careful of the next berth he gets."

The signor raised the whip he held in his hand, and pointed to the road.

"That's your way, Dave Tuttle. Don't say any more, Clotilde; you don't understand a brute of his kidney, and I couldn't take him on again even for your sake."

The girl was silent, but her pitying eyes dwelt upon the man.

Tuttle ground his teeth.

"Is that your last word, Dick Thompson?" he exclaimed fiercely.

"That's the last word."

"Then hear mine! I—"

"I don't want to hear it! Get out!"

"You shall hear it! I'll make you repent this—you and the brat you put in my place. I'll make you—"

"Here, Samson! Help this fellow off the ground."

The Strong Man strode forward.

"Better go," he said.
Tuttle knew the Strong Man of old, and he shrank away.
"Let me alone! I—"
"Better go!"
"Listen to me, Dick Thompson—"
Samson's strong grasp closed upon the ruffian's collar, and he was lifted off the ground, big fellow as he was, as easily as if he had been an infant. He struggled furiously in the grasp of the Strong Man of the Circus, but quite unavailingly.
Samson carried him off the circus-ground as easily as if he had been a featherweight, and dumped him down in the white road that ran through Milthorpe. There he let him go.
"Cut off!" he said.
Dave Tuttle had rolled over in the dust. He staggered to his feet, dusty, savage, furious, and shook his fist towards the signor.
"Oh, buzz off!" said Sammy.
Jack Talbot ran up.
"Here, Tuttle! Tuttle!"
The man turned towards him. Jack was feeling in his pocket, and his hand came out with a heap of silver in it. He held the money out to the ruffian.
"I'm sorry for you, Tuttle, if you can't find work. I know what it's like. Take that, to help you on the way."
The man scowled savagely, and put his hands into his pockets.
"Not a shilling from you," he said. "I'll be revenged yet!"
"Don't be a fool! Better take it!"
"I tell you—"
"That's enough, then."
Jack turned on his heel, and walked away. The Strong Man pointed up the road.
"That's your way, Dave Tuttle," he said. "You'd better go. I don't want to have to lay hands upon you."
And Tuttle, with a last fierce scowl at the circus, strode away.
Clotilde came quietly to Jack as he re-entered the circus pitch, with a thoughtful shade upon his brow.
"Did you give him money, Jack?"
"He wouldn't take it."
The girl shivered a little.
"I wish he had taken it."
"I suppose he knew best whether he needed it, dear."
"It isn't that. I am sure he needed it. It was wicked and wrong of him, what he did; but he regards you as having taken his place in the circus."
"It's too unreasonable. The signor had sacked him, and I took the place because it was empty. Besides, I haven't the same place now—another hand has been taken on since I've been Herr Biberach's assistant with the tigers."
"Yes, he is unreasonable, and all the more to be feared because of that."
Jack laughed carelessly.
"I do not fear him, Clotilde."
"No, I know you do not—I almost wish you did."
"Why?"
"You would be more on your guard then."
Jack laughed again.
"I am sure there is nothing to fear," he said. "But I will be on my guard if you wish it, Clotilde. I would not willingly make you anxious."
"I am sure of that, Jack," said Clotilde softly.
Somewhat to Jack's surprise, Joey Pye took the same view as Clotilde.
"That chap's a poison snake," said the clown afterwards to Jack, confidentially. "If he ever gets a chance at you, look out!"
"But he won't get a chance, Joey. I shall never meet him again."
"No; but look out, all the same."
And Jack laughingly promised that he would. But, careless as he was upon the matter now, he was to discover that Clotilde's forebodings were not without grounds.

CHAPTER 3. At the Circus.

"WALK up, gentlemen!"
The naphtha lights were flaring away outside the circus, and the Milthorpe folk were "walking up" in hundreds.
Joey Pye was mounted upon a barrel outside the tent, and he made his remarks in an endless flow of eloquence to the crowd as they passed into the tent.
Patter was Joey's great gift, and he had never run short of it.
"Walk up, gents! Walk up! Roll up in your thousands! Come and see Sammy, the Strong Man, break milk-chocolate with his teeth! Come and see Joseph Montgomery Pye, the funniest mirth-merchant and wheeze-wangler that ever

wangled wheezes! Admission worth a guinea a box, but the charge is one shilling, cheaper seats sixpence. Walk up and see the show the crowned heads of Europe have been honoured to patronise."
And the crowd laughed good-humouredly, and walked up. The strains of the band could be heard from the interior of the tent, and the place was rapidly filling.
It was close upon time for the evening performance. At the ring-entrance Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring, stood with Jack—the handsome lad in spangles and tights, with a cloak thrown round him, the girl in a soft white dress gathered with a red sash.
Clotilde had her hand upon the neck of Mahomet, her big black horse, and she played with his mane as she spoke to Jack.
"You are fond of the tigers, Jack?"
The boy nodded, his eyes sparkling.
"Very fond of them, Clotilde."
"When you joined the circus, I hoped that we should ride together in the ring," said the girl softly.
"So did I, Clotilde; but I have been very fortunate. I was lucky to get into the ring at all, on any terms."
"Yes; but—"
"But I suppose I shall not be a tiger-tamer always," went on Jack. "I would rather ride. I like the tigers, but I love horses. Some day I shall ride with you, Clotilde, and then I shall have nothing more to wish for."
"Filling up, ain't it?" said Signor Tomsonio, coming by, in a resplendent waistcoat, with his ring whip in his hand.
"We shall do good business here."
"Looks like it, sir."
"There won't be hardly a seat left," said the signor, with satisfaction, looking round the fast-filling tent. "Good. Business isn't so good everywhere, by any means. Times are bad for this line of business. No fear that the ghost won't walk in Tomsonio's Circus, though."
And the signor, with his jolly laugh, passed into the ring. With a succession of hand-springs, Joey Pye joined him there. Then began a dialogue between ring-master and clown, in which the oldest wheezes were cracked anew, and the crowd gave the same old laugh for the same old jokes.
Jack Talbot stood looking on from the ring-entrance while Clotilde did her riding act—an act that never failed to win applause.
Very graceful and beautiful the young girl looked as she went through her daring feats, amid shouts from the crowd.
Carson, the acrobat—the "Handsome Man"—came up behind Jack, and stood watching, too, with a peculiar expression on his face.
Jack glanced at him, and moved off a pace or two.
There was no love lost between the Boy Tiger Tamer and the Handsome Man. Carson had done nothing but attempt to injure him ever since he had joined the circus. His attempts, true, had turned out, as it happened, well for Talbot. Quite unintentionally, the Handsome Man had done him a good turn. He hated him all the more for it, and there were few lengths Jim Carson would not have gone to to obtain his revenge upon the young tiger-tamer.
Carson glanced at Jack as he shifted his position.
"We shall have a good audience to-night," he remarked.
"Yes," said Jack.
"Milthorpe seems to be taking to the circus."
"Yes."
"Of course, you know what the great attraction is," said Carson, with a sneer and a shrug of the shoulders.
"Yes; Clotilde, I suppose."
"Oh, no! It's our latest—our boy tiger-tamer," said Carson, laughing. "That is what is making the people roll in."
Jack was silent.
"At all events I know you think so," went on the Handsome Man. "To my mind, the signor is simply mad. But he has these fancies."
"I suppose he knows his own business best."
"Perhaps; but he is twisted, after all, round the finger of that child."
"What has she to do with it?"
"Bah! You know perfectly well that you owe your position in this circus to the fancy of Clotilde."
"She has been kind to me," said Jack quietly. "I should be the last to deny that."
"And you benefit by it. You would be the last to refuse to do that," sneered Carson. "Little fool—"
Jack's eyes flashed.
"Are you speaking of Miss Clotilde?" he asked.
"Yes."
"Then you will speak more carefully of her, please."
"What do you mean?"
"I am a boy, and you are a man," said Jack, "but if you utter another disrespectful word of Clotilde, I will plant my fist in your mouth."
"Will you, you young whelp? Take that!"

PLUCK.—253.

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Carson lashed out with his right. Jack knocked up the blow, and was about to return it, when Herr Biberach, the Tiger Tamer, came along. The big German stepped between them.

"Ach! I tinks tat you not quarrel here, shoost almost in sight of te ring, ain't it?" he said.

Jack lowered his hands.

"Very well, sir."

Carson gave him a savage glance.

"I will make you eat dirt yet," he said, between his teeth.

"Bah! That you will never do!"

"You shall see!"

The big German looked curiously at Jack. Herr Biberach had a kind face, and kind eyes; but his features and his eyes told too plainly of his overmastering weakness—the love of strong drink.

It was that which made it necessary for Talbot to take charge of the tigers, the Herr playing second part where he had once been master.

Not that there was any bitterness in Herr Biberach's heart over the change. He was only too glad to have so able and so respectful an assistant to aid him. Jack put on no airs over the matter. Though he was billed in huge type as a great attraction, he treated Herr Biberach with perfect respect, as a young assistant should.

"You quarrel mit tat Garson again?" said the Herr.

Jack nodded.

"Keep clear of him," said Herr Biberach. "He vill do you pad turn. He is a pad man."

"I know he is, Herr Biberach."

"Ach! How dey cheer da fraulein!"

Jack's face brightened as he turned to the ring again.

Thunders of applause were following Clotilde's riding performance, and it went straight to Jack's heart to hear it.

The girl came cantering out of the ring, her face flushed and happy, her eyes sparkling.

She gave Jack a smile as she passed.

The Handsome Man was the next on the bill.

He was greeted with cheers by the audience, which redoubled as he went through his difficult feats on the high trapeze.

There was no doubt that Jim Carson was a splendid acrobat, and had a nerve of iron when he was in the air.

His dark face was brighter when he retired, amid cheers, after a double call.

Then the word was given for the tigers.

The great cage was rolled into the arena, and Herr Biberach and Jungle Jack followed it, and all eyes in the crowded circus was fixed upon the Boy Tiger Tamer.

CHAPTER 4.

With the Tigers.

JACK TALBOT felt his heart beat harder as he walked towards the centre of the ring. The public had been very kind to him from his first appearance, yet he was still fluttering a little as he faced the sea of faces and eyes.

Stage fright he had never really felt, but a flutter at the heart was inevitable, though it was likely to wear off as he became more accustomed to the life.

Courage for the dangerous feats he was to go through he had not lacked at all.

There were few lads of his age who would have entered the tigers' cage; few grown-up men either, for that matter.

But Jack Talbot had a gift with animals, and he could do more with the tigers than even Herr Biberach himself.

The Herr realised it, and, conscious, too, of his failing nerve and strength, he gave more and more of the performance to Jack.

Hundreds of eyes were fastened upon the great barred cage in the arena.

Through the upright bars the great tiger and tigress, Julius and Julia, could be seen—Julia lying in the straw, and Julius stalking to and fro, every now and then blinking at the audience.

Herr Biberach and Jungle Jack entered the cage without hesitation, and the door clacked shut behind them.

Then began a performance that held the audience spell-bound.

Herr Biberach took little part in it, beside cracking his whip, and standing in the cage.

It was Jungle Jack whom the tigers obeyed. He put them through their tricks with an ease that was growing more complete every day. They obeyed his voice and his gesture without question.

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Julius, the huge tiger, jumped over his whip, and sprang through paper hoops, with the docility of a dog rather than a tiger.

Then Jack stretched himself on the floor, and made his limbs rigid, and the great tiger seized him by the waistband, and carried him round the cage.

The final act was more thrilling than the rest.

Julius, at a word from Jack, opened his huge mouth to its fullest extent, and Jack put his head into it.

The audience simply gasped.

Signor Tomsonio, in the ring, grunted.

"I won't have it, Joey!" he growled. "It's too risky! I won't have it! I'll have that cut!"

Joey nodded.

"But it fetches 'em!" he said. "People come here and pay a shilling to see Jack get his head nipped off some evening."

"I won't have it! I'll cut it out of the bill, and their shillings can go hang!"

"Right you are, signor!"

There were thunders of applause when the tigers were finally wheeled out of the arena in the great cage.

The Handsome Man regarded Jack with a sneer as he passed in.

But Jack did not notice it.

He was too pleased with himself, and with the amount of "biscuit" he had received, to have any eyes for the sneering looks of the Handsome Man.

There was bitter jealousy in Carson's heart.

The loudest shouts of the people had always been for him; but now there was a new and a growing attraction in the circus.

Already Jack Talbot was received as well as the older favourite, and he was only at the beginning of his career.

It was easy to foresee the time when he would be the chief draw of the circus—when the Handsome Man, his elder by ten years, would have to definitely take second place.

It would not have been a pleasant thought to anyone. But to Carson, arrogant to the last degree, and quick to feel jealous, it was intolerable.

His dislike of Jack Talbot was intensifying, during these days, to a bitter and implacable hatred.

The performance went on, relished greatly by the Milthorpe folk, but Jim Carson had no eyes for it.

"The whelp!" he muttered again and again. "To come here and cut me out—me! A brat from a National school to pass over me like this! The signor is mad! The public are fools! But I'll put a spoke in his wheel!"

And he stood, with bitter thoughts in his mind, envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness running riot in his breast.

Meanwhile, broad smiles wreathed the face of the ring-master, his countenance glowing almost as much as his waistcoat.

The tent was full; the people enthusiastic.

The signor foresaw a week, if not more, of good business at the present pitch, and, as a business man, he was delighted.

"What are you blinking at, Joey?" he asked, having noticed Mr. Pyc glancing more than once at a certain spot in the sixpenny seats.

"A man," said Joey.

"What man? There's more than one there."

Joey grinned.

"There's only one I know."

"Old friend of yours?"

"No; of yours."

The signor looked puzzled.

"Point him out, Joey."

"There he is, with the red neckerchief, sitting next to the stout lady with the four children."

The signor followed this explicit direction, and started a little.

"Dave Tuttle!" he exclaimed.

The man met his glance, and scowled.

"What on earth is he doing here?" growled the signor.

"What is he hanging about the circus for? I suppose he's paid for that seat, too?"

"Well, he hasn't come in on the nod, anyway."

"I wish he'd clear off. I'll turn the hose on him if he comes round again," said the signor. "Hang him!"

It was not till the finish of the performance that Dave Tuttle left the circus. He went slouching out in the crowd, and as he strode away from the tent, his face dark and fixed, he felt a tap on his arm.

"Stop a minute," said a voice he knew, "I want to speak to you!"

Tuttle turned round.

It was the Handsome Man.

CHAPTER 5.

A Precious Pair.

CARSON met the surprised and angry glance of Tuttle with a cool, steady stare. The eyes of the Handsome Man were burning strangely.

Tuttle drew back from his touch.

"Hands off!" he said. "What do you want with me? I've paid for admission, and I suppose I can come into the circus if I like?"

"Yes; I saw you in the audience. What did you come in for?"

"That's my business!"

"And mine?"

"What do you mean?"

"Come this way, and I will tell you."

The ruffian looked at him uneasily.

"What do you want?" he said again. "I ain't no business with you, Jim Carson."

"That is your mistake. You have."

"I don't catch on."

"I will explain—somewhere where a score of ears cannot hear us."

Tuttle hesitated a moment, and then followed the Handsome Man. The night was dark, only a few stars gleaming in the sky.

The Handsome Man strode on over the Heath, taking a direction different from that of the crowd, who were pouring towards Milthorpe town.

Tuttle followed him in silence.

Carson halted at last under the deep shadow of a tree, and turned round. He stood in shadow, the gleam of his face showing dimly in the dark.

Tuttle eyed him nervously.

"What do you want?" he said. "What's your business with me?"

"I know why you came to the circus to-night," said Carson quietly. "I was watching you as you sat there, and I read it all in your face. You hate Jack Talbot."

Tuttle was silent.

"He took your job away; he stopped you from robbing Miss Clotilde, and got you the sack from the signor. You hate him."

Tuttle ground his teeth.

"Suppose I do?"

"You came to the circus to see him—to look at him, because you hate him, because you wanted to think out some plan—any plan—of getting even with him."

Tuttle started.

The Handsome Man had read his thoughts as easily as the page of an open book.

"Well, what of it?" he said sullenly. "What of it, Jim Carson? You haven't told me anything I didn't know. Are you standing up for the brat?"

"I hate him more than you do."

Tuttle gave a low, long whistle. The intense hate in the Handsome Man's voice could not be lost upon him. He understood.

"I savvy," he said. "It's all right. You want to harm him?"

"Yes."

"You want me to help you?"

"Yes."

"I'm your man."

"Good!"

"But how?" said Tuttle slowly. "I've looked out for him more than once; but he's a tough customer—he can look after himself, kid as he is. And he always seems to have Pye or Samson with him. Otherwise—"

"A thrashing isn't enough."

"What do you mean, then?"

"More than that." The Handsome Man lowered his voice. "You know that he's in charge of the tigers now—Herr Biberach's place is little more than ornamental. Jack Talbot is the Tiger Tamer now."

"So the bills say."

"They say the truth. He is going ahead by leaps and bounds; he will be the biggest draw in the circus if he keeps on as he has started."

"And that won't suit you?" said Tuttle, grinning.

"No."

"I s'pose not. What then?"

"He must be stopped."

"I don't see how."

"I know something about you, Tuttle—you were in charge of horses in other places before you came to Tomsonio's circus. You held a better position than that of a stable-hand once."

"That's my affair," said Tuttle sullenly.

The Handsome Man laughed.

"I don't want to pry into your business. But I know that you must have had some experience—probably at doctoring horses, or something of that sort, to lose a race. Eh?"

"As I said before, that's my affair."

"Precisely. But what you have done once, you can do again."

"But the horses—"

"I am not thinking of the horses."

"Of what, then?"

"The tigers."

Tuttle drew a deep breath.

"I savvy."

They were silent for a few moments. Carson broke the silence.

"Can you do it?"

"I dare say I could."

"Some medicine that would act after a certain time—and time it to act when the performance comes off."

"That's the idea."

"And then—"

"But—but—" Tuttle's voice wavered. "That—that may mean—"

The Handsome Man interrupted him.

"Never mind what it may mean. The tigers will refuse to perform—they'll cut up rusty—they'll have to be shot."

"Of course. But—"

"Never mind the rest."

"Hang it! If they turn upon the boy—"

"Let him take his chance. What has he done for you?"

Tuttle gritted his teeth.

"That's true. I had to take my chance—let him take his."

"Good! So long as the tigers become ungovernable, and have to be shot, I am satisfied. If anything else happens, let it. With the tigers dead, Jack Talbot's occupation will be gone."

Dave Tuttle laughed.

"I'm with you."

"And you can do it?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"As soon as you like. As a matter of fact, I've used the stuff before—stuff that's made a horse go raving mad in the middle of a race. I can get it easily enough."

Carson's eyes glistened.

"That's what I want."

"But there's the question of getting it to the animals," said Tuttle dubiously. "I can't hang round the circus."

"You could get into Herr Biberach's quarters easily enough. The tiger's cage is kept in the same tent that he sleeps in. He's nearly always drunk. I will see that he's not in the tent at a certain time to-morrow. You can come round and slip in—it ought to be easy enough."

"Yes, I could manage it."

"Shall we fix upon to-morrow, then?"

"Yes. What time is the performance—seven, as usual, I suppose?"

"Yes, seven."

"Then I ought to get round about six."

"At a quarter to six—and till a quarter past. I'll undertake that the Herr is outside the tent."

"What about the boy?"

"He occupies a caravan at present with Joey Pye. He's not likely to be near the tigers' cage till near the time for the performance."

"It looks plain sailing enough."

"It will be plain sailing if you play your cards well."

"I shall do that. There's another point to be settled."

"That's all right. A sovereign now, and a fiver afterwards."

"That's all serene."

"If it works quite successfully, I'll make it a tenner. That's not much, to ruin Jack Talbot and perhaps get rid of him."

"I'm your hand."

"And I'm your friend if this works. Succeed, and I'll stand your friend with the signor, and get you taken on again, as well as the tenner."

"You're the right sort. You can rely upon me."

And the precious pair parted. Jim Carson walked back to the circus with strangely-shining eyes in the darkness.

CHAPTER 6.

The Doc.

"A RMA virumque cano!"

Joey Pye stopped to listen, with an amazed grin upon his face.

It was the morning, and the circus camp looked very cheerful and busy in the sunlight on Milthorpe Heath.

There was plenty of work to be done, and it was being done; but the performers of the evening's bill were mostly taking the rest they earned by later work.

Jack Talbot sat on the shaft of a waggon, with a book in his hand. On a bench close by him sat a somewhat strange-

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looking figure. It was that of the man known in the circus as the "Doc."

He was an old man—perhaps not so old as he looked, for his way of life made him look older. His face had once been handsome, and the outlines of it were still good. But strong drink had obliterated all else.

A glance at the man showed that he was the slave of liquor, and that he was seldom free from its influence. And when he was free from it, he showed the lassitude and the trembling of the confirmed drunkard, grown to depend wholly upon the stimulation of the poison that was sapping away his life.

The Doc was an enigma to the circus company. He was a harder and more reckless drinker than even Herr Biberach, who was following the same path, at a slower rate. Yet there was a refinement about him that was unmistakable. His education, too, was good—he knew things that made the signor feel something like a headache even to think of. He could talk in as many languages as he had fingers on his hands, as Signor Tomsonio had remarked with awe.

Slave of a wretched vice as he was, that was his only vice; otherwise, he was kind, sweet-tempered, and generous to a fault. He had taken charge of Clotilde's education, much to the signor's satisfaction. For education was necessary—the signor knew that; but he could not bring himself to part with the little maid who was the sunlight of his life. Clotilde was very fond of the Doc, and though it pained her when she saw him—as she could sometimes not help seeing him—under the influence of drink, she never lost her respect for him.

Jack Talbot had found a friend in the Doc. The boy had left school, and he had done very well there. He had hoped to win a scholarship to continue his education at a public school, but fate had been against him.

But he was eager to learn. When he discovered what the attainments of the strange old man were, and that he was teaching Clotilde, he wistfully wished that the Doc would help him; and although he spoke no word on the subject, the Doc seemed to guess.

He had asked Jack one day if he would care to learn, and the boy had eagerly replied that he would, and from that day regular lessons were instituted.

The Doc was teaching him French and Latin, and helping him with books on other subjects.

They were sitting together now with the first book of the Aeneid between them. The Latin grammar Jack studied by himself in his leisure moments. With the tattered copy of Virgil, the Doc gave him literal translations, and explained matters to him as they went along, and he made the dead old poem live again to the boy's mind.

"Arma virumque cano," said Jack, reading aloud. "Trojæ qui primus ab oris Italiam."

Joey Pye made a grimace. "My only fancy slippers!" he murmured. "What a way to spend a morning! Jackie!"

"Fato profugus—" "Jackie!" "Hallo!" "Coming for a bathe in the river?"

Jack shook his head. "Busy!" he replied. The Doc looked up.

"Don't let me keep you." "I'm doing my lessons," said Jack. "The Doc is kind enough to teach me. Buzz off, Joey, and don't interrupt."

Mr. Pye yawned. "Rather you than me, any day. I thought kids were always glad to leave school behind them. I know I was."

Talbot laughed. "It's a difference in taste, Joey. I'd rather study Latin than bathe any day; so you'll have to excuse me."

"I'll take Sammy. I'd rather take you. Sammy's a big, strong beast, and he might play tricks on me. If I took you, I should play tricks on you," said Mr. Pye plaintively. "Well, go ahead, and have a good feed on Latin while you're about it."

And Mr. Pye marched off in search of the Strong Man. Clotilde came down to the halted waggon, with a book in her hand, and a cheerful smile upon her sweet face.

She sat down beside Jack, and the lesson proceeded. The Doc had the gift, most invaluable of all to a teacher, of making a lesson interesting, of causing it to awake spontaneous interest in the breast of the pupil; and his lessons always seemed too short to the youngsters.

Herr Biberach came out of his tent, where he had been feeding the tigers, and looked across at them.

The Doc looked round, and closed his book. "That is all now," he said. He rose from the bench. "I have to speak to Herr Biberach. Good-bye!"

PLUCK.—253.

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"Thank you, Doc," said Jack. The Doc nodded, and walked away, the book under his arm.

Jack looked after him, and then glanced at Clotilde. There was a wistful expression upon the girl's face.

She knew, as well as Jack, what the Doc had to say to the Tiger Tamer.

Even at that early hour the two hard drinkers were accustomed to begin their potations, and in an hour's time the Doc was likely to be lying in the grass, overcome with liquor.

"What a pity it is!" murmured Clotilde. "He is so good, and so kind, and so——"

She paused. "So reckless," said Jack. "He is not bad—he cannot help it. Do you know, Clotilde, I think he must have had some terrible trouble at some time in his life, to make him take to that as he has done. He is a good man."

"It is a pity!" "It may not last for always."

Jack spoke hopefully, but he felt otherwise. The brand of the drunkard was upon the Doc, to be carried with him to his grave.

The boy and the girl rose, and closed their books, and walked away together over the green, scented heath. One of the delights of the circus life for these two was the morning rambling in woods and fields.

It was close upon the time for the mid-day dinner of the circus troupe when they came back, tired but happy, with cheerful faces. Both were growing up, yet both were children still, when circumstances allowed them to be.

In the field near the circus, under the shade of a big tree, a number of the hands were gathered, and there was a general sound of chuckling.

Jack glanced towards them. "It's the Doc, sir!" said one of the men, laughing. They approached the group, and looked.

The Doc was seated under the tree, half hidden in the grass, his back against the trunk, his legs stretched out.

His head was nodding, but his eyes were wide open, and he was blinking at intervals at the grinning circle.

He was evidently in an advanced state of intoxication, and he was uttering an endless flow of talk, strangely mixed in strange languages—quotations from the classic poets mingled with meaningless babble of a fevered brain. The last lesson he had given Jack and Clotilde seemed to be running in his mind.

"Arma virumque cano— Give me another glass, Bibby. I'm dry to-day. Arms and the man I sing. Ha, ha! Vir, viri, viro, virum, vir, viro! Who first came to the shores of Italy, and—and—and— Give me something to drink! Ah, I must have more to drink! Per me si va nella citta dolente!"

He pronounced the last words in a deep and strange voice that went right to the hearts of Jack and Clotilde, and hushed the thoughtless chuckles of the others.

Truly, he had been into the "citta dolente"—that city of dreadful night, conjured up in the visions of intoxication.

"He's got it bad this time," said Jim Carson, joining the group, and looking on with a smile of cynical amusement.

"There he goes again! French this time!" grinned another.

The Doc was wandering on again. "Mon pere, apres avoir longtemps porte les arms pour le service de la monarchie se retira—retira—retira— Give me something to drink!"

"Go it, Doc!" said the Handsome Man. "My hat! He was spouting Greek by the yard the last time. Give us the Iliad again, old man!"

The Doc blinked at him. "Menin aiede, Thea," he mumbled. "Peleiadeco Achilleus oulomenen—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Jack pushed his way through the grinning circle. "Shall I help you in, Doc?" he asked quietly.

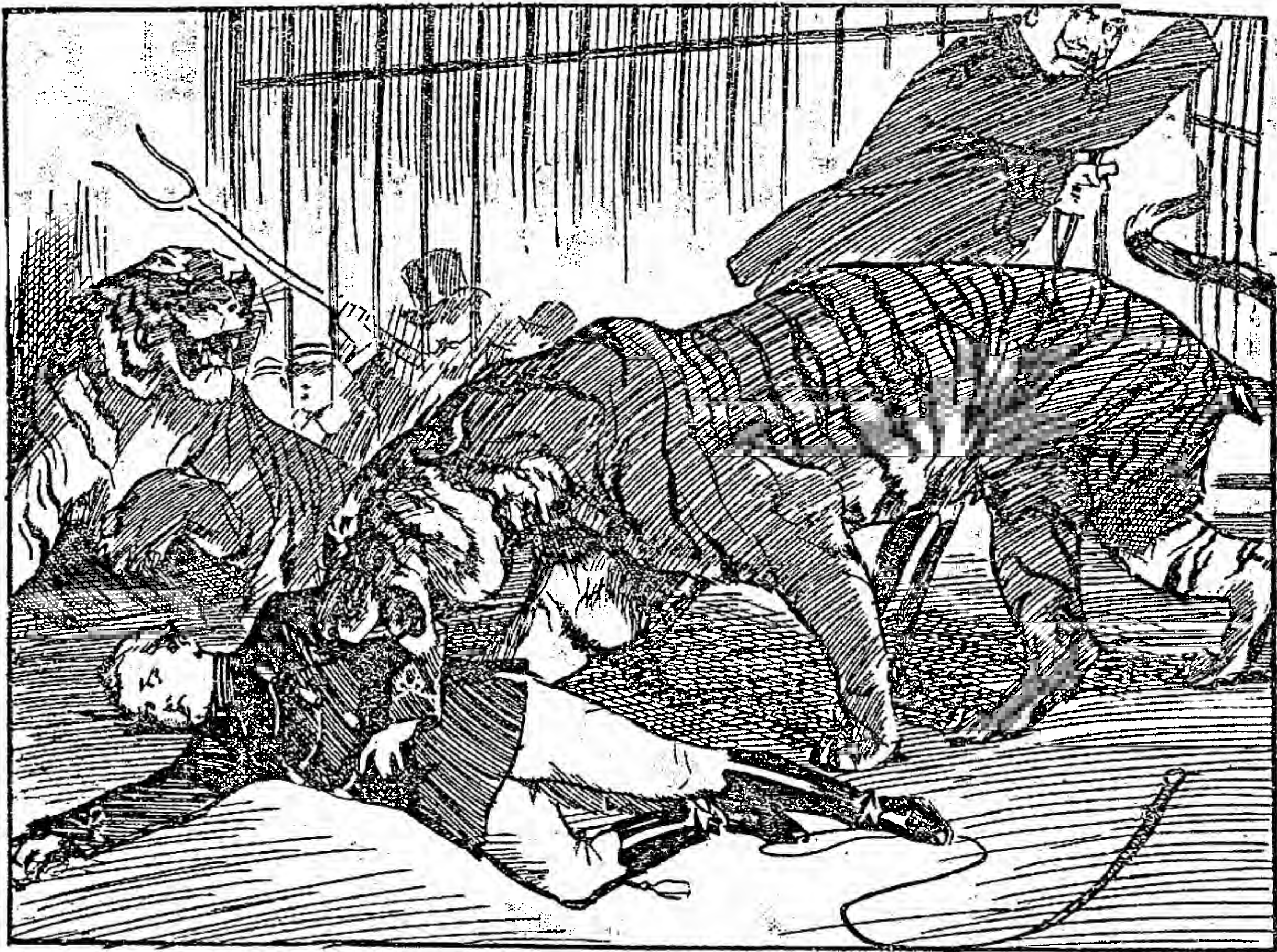
"I'm all right!" "Yes; but you'd like to lie down!" "I'm lying down," said the Doc, sliding into the grass. "Let a man alone!"

"Yes, but—" "Get away! Garcon—garcon, I'm dry! Garcon!" "Ha, ha! He thinks he's in a cafe now!"

"Garcon!" mumbled the Doc. "Doc—" "Lemme alone!"

And the Doc went to sleep. Jack quietly covered his face from the sun, and left him.

It was better to leave him to sleep it off. The circus comrades walked slowly away, and something was glistening upon Clotilde's eyelashes.



Jullus the tiger sprang straight at the boy, and Jack went down. Over him stood the savage beast, roaring with a thunderous sound.

CHAPTER 7.
The Dastard.

"WHAT are you doing here?" Jack Talbot uttered the question abruptly. The evening was drawing on, and Jack—who had learned that Herr Biberach was not to be depended on—was strolling down towards the tent where the tigers were kept in their cage.

As he came up to the tent he almost ran into Dave Tuttle. The man tried to slink by, but Jack caught him by the arm.

"Let me go!" muttered Tuttle.

"Hold on! What are you doing here?"

"That's my business!"

"Stop! It seems to me that you have been up to no good!" said Jack sternly. "You know you have no right to hang about here! If you have been stealing——"

Jack broke off as the ruffian made a sudden blow at him. A drive on the chest sent the boy staggering backwards; and, as he relaxed his grasp, Tuttle broke into a run, and disappeared round the signor's caravan.

Joey Pye came running up.

"What's the matter? Who was that, Jack?"

"Dave Tuttle."

"Phew! What was he doing here?"

"Some mischief, I expect!" said Jack, breathing hard. The blow upon the chest had been a heavy one, and he was a little winded. "I think he went into the tent, but I am not sure. I don't know if the Herr's there."

Mr. Pye shook his head.

"He isn't. He's in Milthorpe, drinking with Jim Carson."

"With Carson?"

"Yes. The Handsome Man took him out for a stroll into the town about a quarter of an hour ago—and you know what it means!"

"The cad! This is not the first time, either!"

"Well, the Herr never wants asking twice to take a drink," grinned Joey Pye. "Carson seems to want to blue his tin—that's all. Let's take a look round the tent, and see if all's serene. That chap Tuttle is vicious enough to open the door of the tigers' cage, I believe!"

"I've no doubt of it. But the door's padlocked. He couldn't!"

"Good! Let's have a look, though."

They entered the tent. It was dusky inside, and Jack lighted a lamp.

In the great cage both Julius and Julia seemed to be unusually active. They were loping up and down the ample space of the cage, and they blinked strangely at the light of the lamp.

"They look restless," said Joey Pye.

"It always disturbs them for strangers to enter the tent," said Jack, frowning. "Tuttle has been in here."

"Looks like it."

Jack advanced to the cage and called to the tigers.

Julius allowed Jack to stroke his head through the bars.

"All serene?" said Joey.

"Yes. Julius seems all right now."

"They've been feeding."

"Yes, the Herr must have fed them before he went out. They haven't finished their grub yet."

"Let's leave them to finish it."

"Right-ho!"

And they left the tent.

The tigers soon restarted upon the great lumps of meat, growling over it as they ate.

Jack was relieved in his mind as far as the tigers were concerned; but he wondered what Tuttle had wanted there. Possibly the rascal had been looking for an opportunity to steal. Yet in that case it was curious that he had not left it till a later hour, when it would be darker, and most of the circus hands would be busy in connection with the performance.

But Jack had no time now to think about Dave Tuttle.

The man was gone, and Jack had to prepare for the performance.

In his tent dressing-room he donned the garb of Jungle Jack, and came out with a light coat over it.

Herr Biberach had returned, and to Jack's relief he found that the Herr was sober. He had fully expected him to return intoxicated.

PLUCK.—253.

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The Herr nodded to him genially. "You va' retty," he remarked. "I soon gets retty. Ain't it?" "Plenty of time for our turn," remarked Jack. "There's Miss Clo' de first, and the acrobat turn." "Ach, Tat is so!" "Ach, Herr had time to dress for the show, and Jack Talbot watched the circus from the ring entrance, as he often did. When the Handsome Man came off, after his turn, he looked curiously at the boy. Jack would have allowed him to pass without a word, but the acrobat paused to speak. "There's a big audience to-night!" he said, in a more friendly tone than usual.

Talbot nodded. "Yes, it looks like it," he said. "You don't feel nervous, eh?" "Oh, no!" "You are lucky! I had stage-fright for weeks when I first took to my profession!" said the Handsome Man, in a chatty way.

Jack nodded again. He was surprised by the cordiality of the Handsome Man, and he did not trust him.

"But you have been very lucky since you joined the circus," said Carson.

"They have been very kind to me—most of them."

"But not all?" said the Handsome Man, laughing.

"No."

"One always has rubs at times," said Carson. "But, after all, what does it matter? There is room for us both in the circus. I suppose?"

"I hope so."

And Carson nodded and passed on, leaving Jack in a state of profound amazement.

Jack was the reverse of suspicious by nature, yet he could not bring himself to believe that this new cordiality of Jim Carson's was wholly genuine. But what purpose the acrobat could have to serve by it was beyond him.

He did not think much about it, however. It was time for his own turn. He glanced at the tigers as the cage was trundled in.

Julius was growling, and the tigress sat in a corner of the cage with a strange glow burning in her eyes. The tigers were not exactly restive but there was something in their appearance that Jack did not quite like.

He stepped up to the cage, and called to Julius.

Julius growled.

"Tat tiger not seem so goot in te temper as usual, ain't it, py Chorge!" said Herr Biberach. "Vat you talk?"

"He seems to be in a state of nerves," said Jack anxiously. "I can't quite catch on to it. Has he had any change in his food?"

"Nein, nein."

"You haven't noticed him ailing, sir?"

The Herr shook his head.

"Nein, nein. Not at all, pefore."

"He seems rocky somehow."

Signor Tomsonio tapped Jack upon the shoulder and stopped him. The circus-master was looking very serious.

"Jack, I want to speak to you."

"Go ahead, sir."

"No more of that shoving your head into the tiger's mouth. I don't like it. It makes me nervous."

Jack laughed.

"It's quite safe, sir."

"Perhaps it is, but I don't like it. The public may like it, but the public can go and eat coke. Don't do it any more."

"Just as you like, sir."

"You see, I'm responsible for you," said the signor. "I'm not going to have your head nipped off by a tiger."

"Then I'll keep it on as long as I can, sir!" said Jack, laughing.

The signor looked relieved.

There was no doubt that the tiger's mouth act was a thrilling one, but Signor Tomsonio didn't care for that. As he told Joey Pye, it made his heart go into his mouth, and he didn't like it—to which Mr. Pye had rejoined that sheep's heart raw naturally wouldn't be pleasant.

The cage stopped in the centre of the arena, and, amid a sea of faces and watching eyes, Jack and Herr Biberach entered it.

CHAPTER 8.

Danger.

JACK TALBOT had noticed that Julius did not seem quite himself when the cage was brought in, but when he entered the cage it struck him more than ever. There was something decidedly wrong with the tiger—and with the tigress too, though in a lesser degree.

He rubbed Julius's head, but instead of the usual lick of PLUCK.—253.

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the tongue in acknowledgment, Julius growled and showed his teeth.

Herr Biberach looked surprised.

"Ach! Dere is someting wrong mit Shulius to-night," he said. "Vat has been and happen mit itself mit te tiger?"

"He is ill, I should think," said Jack anxiously.

"He is in vun pad temper, ain't it?"

Julius growled again.

Signor Tomsonio heard that growl. To the people "in front" it was a part of the show, but the signor knew the sound of an angry growl. His face was shadowed as he hurried towards the cage. His glance anxiously met Jack's through the bars.

"Anything wrong, Jack?"

"No, I think not."

"It sounded—"

"Julius is a little annoyed about something, that's all."

"No risks, mind."

Jack laughed.

"All right."

"Tat is all right pefore," said the big German. "Mein tigers ain't savage mit demselves after, ain't it."

"We don't want a case in the papers," grunted the signor, "and I don't want Jackie chewed up. I'd rather cut the turn."

"Der beobles would made drouble mit you for tat, mein frent!"

The signor glanced round at the sea of faces rising in tiers from the crowded seats. He grunted.

"I suppose they would—but I'd rather stick that than any risk! Mind your eye!"

"Tat is all right."

"It's all right, really, sir," said Jack, fully believing what he said—for, of course, he had no suspicion of the villainous trick that had been played. "Julius is a little out of sorts, that's all."

"Very well, I'll take your word for it, Jack."

"Rely on it, sir!"

The signor retreated from the cage.

The exchange of words had not been overheard by the people in front, but some of them seemed to guess that something was amiss, and eager eyes were bent upon the cage, necks craned forward to see.

"It's all right, signor," said Joey Pye. "You can trust Jackie's judgment with any critter—horse or tiger."

"I hope so, Joey. I don't like the look of Julius, that's all."

"There was trouble before, but that was owing to the Herr being drunk in the cage," said the clown. "Bibby's all right now."

"I wish Julius were all right," said the signor uneasily. "I don't like the look of him. Look here, Joey, cut off and tell them to be ready with the iron bars!"

"Oh, all right!"

"And get my gun to the ring-entrance, in case I want it."

Mr. Pye stared.

"Your gun?"

"Yes," said the signor irritably. "I tell you I don't like the look of Julius. I've seen animals in their tantrums before. I haven't run a circus for twenty years without learning something about animals, Joey Pye. I tell you Julius looks as if he meant trouble."

"Oh, good, if you really think so, signor!"

"Well, I do."

"Then I'm off like a shot!"

And the clown turned a series of flying somersaults to the ring exit—and there he biffed right into Jim Carson, and sent him staggering.

Joey was on his feet again in a second, with a grin upon his face, in full expectation of getting a torrent of abuse when he saw whom it was he had overturned.

But to his surprise Carson said nothing.

The Handsome Man was as white as chalk, and his eyes burned strangely. He gave Joey one look, an indefinable glance, and then resumed his watching of the ring.

Joey Pye stared at him.

"I'm sorry, Carson," he said.

"It's all right."

"Did I hurt you?"

"Never mind."

"You see, I didn't see you standing there."

"It's all right, I tell you."

"You look queer," said Pye, persisting, for he was very curious. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

The acrobat muttered an oath.

"Nothing, I tell you. I am all right. Let me alone."

Mr. Pye gave an expressive whistle.

"Oh, certainly, as you're so polite about it! I don't want to waste the inestimable treasures of my conversation upon an unappreciative listener. You will wish some day that you

had paid more attention, and taken more care to gather up the crumbs of wisdom."

The Handsome Man turned a savagely dark look upon him.

"Will you go?"

"With pleasure!" said Joey. "You're a nice man to say good-bye to!"

And he went his way.

In a couple of minutes two circus hands with the red-hot bars were ready, and a third man held the signor's gun at the ring entrance, in case it should be wanted.

Then Joey Pye went somersaulting back into the ring. He found it very quiet, and the people in front in an evident state of tension. The signor was grave and worried.

"No trouble yet, signor?" asked Joey, in an undertone. Signor Tomsonio shook his head.

"Not yet."

"But you're expecting it?"

"Look at Julius!"

Mr. Pye looked.

There was trouble in the tiger's cage, though not of a serious nature so far. The tigress was curled in a corner, and was watching the tamers with half-open eyes, blinking at them. Julius, the tiger, had retreated to one side, and, with his head lowered, was half-crouching, looking fierce at Jack Talbot.

The Herr stood by the door of the cage, evidently in a helpless state. All his old nerve was gone. Since the time when the tigers had turned on him, Herr Biberach had not been the Herr Biberach of old.

Without Jack, he knew that he would never master the tigers, and at this moment of tension all depended upon the Boy Tiger-tamer.

Jack's nerve seemed to be of iron.

He realised now that Julius meant trouble—grim trouble—though the reason he could not possibly imagine. Had he suspected the dastardly trick that had been played, he would have known what to expect, and he could have retreated from the cage in time.

As it was, he only imagined that Julius was in an unusually bad temper, and at such a time it was the worst possible policy to yield to the tiger.

Jack's face had set grimly. Either he or the tiger had to surrender, and he was determined that it should not be he. He cracked the whip loudly.

"Allez!" he shouted.

Julius growled. He began to lash his sides with his tail and growled continuously—a deep, rolling growl.

"Ach!" murmured the Herr. "He is in a bad temper, ain't it?"

Jack's eyes flashed.

"Allez!"

Still Julius only lashed and growled.

Jack swung his hand aloft with the heavy whip in it. His flashing eyes were fixed upon the burning orbs of the tiger.

"Allez!"

Crack! The whip descended with great force upon the sulky head.

The blow was needed—it was the blow of the master. At any other time it would have brought Julius to his senses. But the poison was working in the brain of the tiger. The maddening potion mixed with his food was telling at last. The great beast gave a roar, and sprang forward.

Jack eluded the spring with a backward jump, and the tiger dropped almost at his feet.

The boy's eyes blazed.

Crack! The whip descended again, more heavily than before. Jack did not mean to give in.

Julius roared again—a roar that shook every corner of the great tent, and brought deep echoes rolling back.

Roar on roar!

The audience were all on their feet now, pale and tense. Some of the more nervous ones were already making for the exits.

The signor clicked his teeth.

"The irons—quick! What?"

Joey Pye was pale as death.

"The tiger's mad!" he cried. "Good heavens—look!"

The tiger had retreated for a moment; but now his eyes were flaming, his mouth was white with froth.

He sprang straight at the boy, and Jack went down, close to the bars of the cage, and over him stood the savage tiger, roaring with a thunderous sound.

CHAPTER 9.

A Narrow Shave.

JUNGLE JACK lay in the cage, and the tiger's paws were on his breast. The boy's face was white, and hard as iron.

Some lingering knowledge that he was doing wrong seemed to restrain the tiger from extremities, even in that fearful moment. But the brute was almost insane. Ferocity glared from his burning eyes, and was roared from his open, frothing jaws.

Jack did not move. He realised now that he had been mistaken—that this was no attack of obstinacy or bad temper on the part of the tiger, but an attack of savage insanity—and in that terrible moment it flashed into his mind what Dave Tuttle's visit to the tiger's tent had really meant.

Julius had been doctored. Some potion was working in his veins, and was the cause of this unexpected ebullition of ferocity.

The boy had almost given himself up for lost. His authority over the maddened animal was completely gone. One rending lash of the great claws would let out his life at a sloop, and at any second it seemed that the great beast would give it.

Herr Biberach, almost fainting with horror, staggered against the door of the cage.

The tigress was bestirring herself now. As her savage eyes were turned upon him, the Herr slipped the cage door open and staggered out.

He fell almost fainting in the tan, and somebody clapped the door shut in time to keep the tigress from following him into the arena.

PLUCK—253.

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There were shouts and screams of alarm from the audience. Men, women, and children were stampeding wildly for the exits. The air was a babel with shrieks of alarm, the overturning of seats, the trampling of wild, terrified feet.

"The irons!" gasped the signor.

The hands with the ready hot irons rushed up to the cage. At the glow of the hot metal thrust between the bars Julius roared fiercely, and roared again; but he retreated. He retreated without having torn Jack with claws or jaws.

But the boy lay still within the cage. Julius and Julia both approached him, and only the flaming heat of the red-hot bars kept them off.

"My gun—my gun!" muttered the signor, white as death. Joey Pye thrust it into his hands. There was a cry from Herr Biberach, as he lay half unconscious with horror and dread in the sawdust. He had heard.

"Ach! You will not shoot mein tigers before!"

No one heeded him. The signor levelled the gun through the bars of the cage.

"Jack!" he said, in a low voice.

Jack did not move, but he turned his eyes upon the signor.

"Yes, sir?"

His voice was steady, even at that moment.

"Crawl towards the door. I'll keep the tigers in the cage, dead or alive. Crawl! There's something fearfully wrong with them. They're going mad!"

"Yes, sir."

Jack could see that for himself. The tiger and the tigress were roaring terribly, lashing their sides with their tails, and snapping at each other. Julius tore a gash in the neck of the tigress, and she clawed him over the back, and the yells and roars redoubled.

Jack crawled quietly but quickly towards the door.

Julius made a dash at him, but the glowing hot irons through the bars drove him back, snarling and snorting.

Jack reached the door. To open it just wide enough to allow of his exit, and to close it again quickly—that was the idea.

"Quick, Jackia!" whispered Samson, the Strong Man. "I'll open the door."

"Right!"

Samson opened it a couple of inches. Jack squirmed against it, and pushed it further open, and bundled out into the sawdust. Samson slammed the door shut again.

Even as the Strong Man shut the door, and the safety catch fell, the heavy body of the tiger hurtled through the air again, and crashed against the door.

But Julius spent his strength in vain. The iron bars held firm.

The signor wiped his brow, and handed his gun back to Joey Pye.

"Thank Heaven!" he gasped. "That was a near thing!"

"I should think it was," said Jack, brushing the sawdust from his tights. "The tigers are mad; but it seems to be passing off now. I should think they will be all right again soon. But it certainly was a close shave."

And nobody ventured to disagree with the young tiger tamer—it had indeed been a close shave.

Afterwards, when Jack Talbot explained how he had met Dave Tuttle near the tiger's tent, it was clear what was the matter with the animals, and who was the real cause of the catastrophe. But no one suspected further, and the Handsome Man kept his own counsel.

THE END.

(Two more splendid complete tales next Saturday, entitled "The Bulldog Breed," a fine tale of Hector Drake, and "Jack Talbot's Birthday," a magnificent story of circus life. Order your copy of "Pluck" in advance. Price One Penny.)

STAUNCH AS STEEL.

Continued from page 16.

CHAPTER 12. The Rescue.

THERE was no conveyance to be obtained at that early hour in the little village at which the search-party had stopped for rest, so the Fighting Parson and his band had to take to the road again on foot, trusting to secure the means of faster locomotion later on.

Sam trotted ahead, seeming well content now that they were following him. It appeared that they had overshot their mark somewhat, for the road by which he led them was that along which they had journeyed late the preceding evening. As a matter of fact, Sam had picked up Walker's trail in a village to which Willisford's tool had gone to send a telegram—doubtless to the man who had waited in the motor-car near the top of Ambury Hill. It was the trail of Walker which had taken the dog to the lonely house.

Walker's story of seeing him with the ball in his mouth held just as much of the truth as Hector had thought. He had seen Sam, but he had not even attempted to take the ball from him. He had made the best use of his legs in order to clear out of the dog's way. The ball which Willisford had shown Hector was one that search in a drawer full of odds and ends, dating back to the time when the big, lonely house had been full of life, had revealed.

The sun was high in the heavens as the weary searchers trudged up Ambury Hill.

"Look!" cried Tom Nockolds, clutching Jim's arm. "Surely that's the caravan!"

Yes, they felt sure it must be. It was hardly likely that two such vehicles would be in the neighbourhood.

A bend in the road had prevented them from seeing the desertion of the caravan by Walker and Willisford. The pace at which it was coming, rocking and swaying as it came, struck them at once.

It was Jimmy who cried:

"There's no driver! Surely he can't be inside!"

Then, as the heavy vehicle plunged down towards them, and they drew to the edge of the road, Jimmy sprang forward.

Somehow he was aware of what the rest only suspected. There were others there who would have done what he did had the thought come to them. But it only came to him.

He did not see, as they did, Hector's face at the window.

For before that he had leaped, leaped for the narrow platform in front of the caravan! That leap looked suicidal; it made those who saw catch their breath in fear and amazement.

PLUCK.—253.

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But Jim Allchin was active beyond the ordinary, and resolute as well as active; staunch as steel, too, like the lad he loved.

He landed on all fours on the platform. He did not know, nor did Hector, that the rest had made a rush for the back of the caravan, had clutched hold, hanging on with their weight thrown back, so that they might slacken its pace, if only by a little.

Would it have availed? Hardly, without Jim's hand on the levers in front. Yet it was all that they could do, and they did it, risking their lives for Hector's sake and Jim's. Not the Fighting Parson and Charles Drake only, but Fitz, too, and Tom Nockolds, and even Cricket Curtoise.

How Jim contrived to slacken the pace of the caravan he could hardly tell. He had never driven a motor-car, and his frantic tugs upon those levers were largely experimental. But he knew when he had jammed on the brakes, for they bit and squealed, and a mastery of the principles of steering was not difficult to one who had watched Christopher Cargless at the wheel of his airship.

Once he thought that all was up with him and Hector—of those behind he did not know. There was a lurch that sent the caravan from one side of the road to the other; for a moment it tilted up on two wheels, with those on the other side inches off the ground. Perhaps the weight behind, thrown quickly in the right direction at the Fighting Parson's word of command, told then.

Hector came to himself with Sam licking his face, his head on his father's knees, and his friends all around him.

"My boy!" said Charles Drake, and lifted him in his arms, and hugged him to his breast. To Hector there came then a better understanding of his father's real affection for him than he had ever had before.

"Old man!" said Fitz brokenly, his lips twitching under his little fair moustache. And the Fighting Parson said nothing; but his grip on Hector's shoulder spoke much, without need of words.

What could he say to them all? What could he say to Jim?

"There's nothing at all wants sayin' old pal," Jim told him. "You've done more than a little thing like that for me."

Messages sped over the wires to the police as soon as a post-office was reached. But they had not the identification mark or even a description of the car which had met Willisford, and all the inquiries came to nothing. The rascal was still at large, and while he remained so, Hector Drake had a deadly and dangerous enemy.

But Hector recked little of that. He might have enemies; but had he not also friends?—ay, and friends who were, like himself, staunch as steel!

(Another splendid story of Hector Drake next Saturday. Please order your copy of "PLUCK" in advance. Price 1d.)