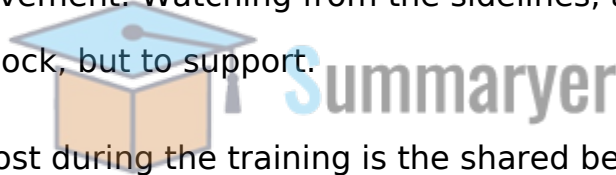


# CHAPTER X - The Circus Boys Across the Continent

**CHAPTER X - The Circus Boys Across the Continent** opens with tension brewing in the dressing tent after Teddy Tucker's mischievous antics with a mule disrupt the performers' routine. Tempers flare, but the mood softens when Phil Forrest defuses the irritation with humor, sharing how Teddy avoided punishment by hiding inside a costume trunk. While the chaos subsides, Phil is soon sent to deliver a message to a performer known as Mrs. Robinson. Expecting a stern older woman, he is startled to discover that she is none other than "Little Dimples," the graceful rider he once helped during a dangerous moment in the ring. Their reunion is warm and filled with mutual respect. In their conversation, she expresses gratitude for the tightly knit family atmosphere of the circus and reflects on its meaningful differences compared to larger, more impersonal shows. Her sincerity strikes a chord with Phil, deepening his admiration for her beyond the performance ring.

As they talk further, Little Dimples offers to teach Phil the essentials of bareback riding, recognizing his enthusiasm and potential. Phil accepts with eagerness, not out of vanity, but because he dreams of mastering every aspect of circus life. He shares his long-term ambition of someday owning a circus, a vision born from both passion and resilience following the loss of his mother. Hearing that Dimples has a husband and child currently touring with another troupe, Phil feels an unexpected connection to her. Their discussion, filled with openness and sincerity, reveals how deeply relationships are formed within the circus, where shared risks and dreams create enduring bonds. Rather than a lecture, Dimples's offer feels like a rite of passage—one performer extending a hand to the next.

Their first lesson takes place in the practice area, where the circus ring's sawdust floor offers a forgiving surface for mistakes. Phil starts the session with unsteady footing and an awkward mount, quickly learning that grace on horseback comes only through focus and repetition. Dimples coaches him patiently, giving simple, clear guidance while encouraging him to trust the rhythm of the horse beneath him. Though he struggles to maintain balance at first, his persistence begins to show results. As the horse circles the ring, Phil slowly improves, adjusting his posture and responding more intuitively to its movement. Watching from the sidelines, a few performers offer casual applause—not to mock, but to support.



What stands out most during the training is the shared belief that greatness isn't born overnight. Dimples emphasizes that even the most celebrated riders began with falls and bruises, and that talent, though important, must be matched by discipline. Phil listens closely, knowing that every correction and compliment comes from a place of earned wisdom. He asks questions, absorbs feedback, and doesn't let small failures deter him. In time, he makes noticeable progress, enough to earn a genuine nod of approval from Dimples. Her pride in his growth feels more like that of a coach than a colleague.

As the lesson ends, Phil thanks her with sincerity and promises to keep practicing. Dimples tells him that few things in circus life are more rewarding than helping others find their footing. She mentions how rare it is to see such commitment in someone so young, and urges him not to lose that fire. Phil, encouraged by the day's progress, is more convinced than ever that his path lies not just in performance, but in becoming someone others in the circus can rely on. His goals are no longer just about applause—they're about building something lasting, inspired by the support he's received.

Returning to the tents with sore legs and a fresh sense of purpose, Phil finds Teddy engaged in another comedic exchange, poking fun at his own earlier mischief. The atmosphere is light, filled with the casual banter that defines circus life between shows. Though Teddy jokes about Phil becoming a "pony prince," he also shows quiet

admiration for his friend's determination. Together, the boys head off to finish chores before dinner, their bond strengthened by a shared understanding of what it means to earn respect in a world where every act, fall, and triumph happens in full view. As the chapter closes, their path forward feels both uncertain and full of promise—just like the circus itself.

