

## CHAPTER XXIV

Harris Collins was fifty-two years of age. He was slender and dapper, and in appearance and comportment was so sweet- and gentle-spirited that the impression he radiated was almost of sissyness. He might have taught a Sunday-school, presided over a girls' seminary, or been a president of a humane society.

His complexion was pink and white, his hands were as soft as the hands of his daughters, and he weighed a hundred and twelve pounds. Moreover, he was afraid of his wife, afraid of a policeman, afraid of physical violence, and lived in constant dread of burglars. But the one thing he was not afraid of was wild animals of the most ferocious sorts, such as lions, tigers, leopards, and jaguars. He knew the game, and could conquer the most refractory lion with a broom-handle--not outside the cage, but inside and locked in.

It was because he knew the game and had learned it from his father before him, a man even smaller than himself and more fearful of all things except animals. This father, Noel Collins, had been a successful animal trainer in England, before emigrating to America, and in America he had continued the success and laid the foundation of the big animal training school at Cedarwild, which his son had developed and built up after him. So well had Harris Collins built on his father's foundation that the place was considered a model of sanitation and kindness. It entertained

many visitors, who invariably went away with their souls filled with ecstasy over the atmosphere of sweetness and light that pervaded the place. Never, however, were they permitted to see the actual training. On occasion, performances were given them by the finished products which verified all their other delightful and charming conclusions about the school. But had they seen the training of raw novices, it would have been a different story. It might even have been a riot. As it was, the place was a zoo, and free at that; for, in addition to the animals he owned and trained and bought and sold, a large portion of the business was devoted to boarding trained animals and troupes of animals for owners who were out of engagements, or for estates of such owners which were in process of settlement. From mice and rats to camels and elephants, and even, on occasion, to a rhinoceros or a pair of hippopotamuses, he could supply any animal on demand.

When the Circling Brothers' big three-ring show on a hard winter went into the hands of the receivers, he boarded the menagerie and the horses and in three months turned a profit of fifteen thousand dollars. More--he mortgaged all he possessed against the day of the auction, bought in the trained horses and ponies, the giraffe herd and the performing elephants, and, in six months more was quit of an of them, save the pony Repeater who turned air-springs, at another profit of fifteen thousand dollars. As for Repeater, he sold the pony several months later for a sheer profit of two thousand. While this bankruptcy of the Circling Brothers had been the greatest financial achievement of Harris Collin's life, nevertheless he enjoyed no mean permanent income from his plant, and, in addition,

split fees with the owners of his board animals when he sent them to the winter Hippodrome shows, and, more often than not, failed to split any fee at all when he rented the animals to moving-picture companies.

Animal men, the country over, acknowledged him to be, not only the richest in the business, but the king of trainers and the grittiest man who ever went into a cage. And those who from the inside had seen him work were agreed that he had no soul. Yet his wife and children, and those in his small social circle, thought otherwise. They, never seeing him at work, were convinced that no softer-hearted, more sentimental man had ever been born. His voice was low and gentle, his gestures were delicate, his views on life, the world, religion and politics, the mildest. A kind word melted him. A plea won him. He gave to all local charities, and was gravely depressed for a week when the Titanic went down. And yet--the men in the trained-animal game acknowledged him the nerviest and most nerveless of the profession. And yet--his greatest fear in the world was that his large, stout wife, at table, should crown him with a plate of hot soup. Twice, in a tantrum, she had done this during their earlier married life. In addition to his fear that she might do it again, he loved her sincerely and devotedly, as he loved his children, seven of them, for whom nothing was too good or too expensive.

So well did he love them, that the four boys from the beginning he forbade from seeing him work, and planned gentler careers for them. John, the oldest, in Yale, had elected to become a man of letters, and, in the meantime, ran his own automobile with the corresponding standard

of living such ownership connoted in the college town of New Haven. Harold and Frederick were down at a millionaires' sons' academy in Pennsylvania; and Clarence, the youngest, at a prep. school in Massachusetts, was divided in his choice of career between becoming a doctor or an aviator. The three girls, two of them twins, were pledged to be cultured into ladies. Elsie was on the verge of graduating from Vassar. Mary and Madeline, the twins, in the most select and most expensive of seminaries, were preparing for Vassar. All of which required money which Harris Collins did not grudge, but which strained the earning capacity of his animal-training school. It compelled him to work the harder, although his wife and the four sons and three daughters did not dream that he actually worked at all. Their idea was that by virtue of superior wisdom he merely superintended, and they would have been terribly shocked could they have seen him, club in hand, thrashing forty mongrel dogs, in the process of training, which had become excited and out of hand.

A great deal of the work was done by his assistants, but it was Harris Collins who taught them continually what to do and how to do it, and who himself, on more important animals, did the work and showed them how. His assistants were almost invariably youths from the reform schools, and he picked them with skilful eye and intuition. Control of them, under their paroles, with intelligence and coldness on their part, were the conditions and qualities he sought, and such combination, as a matter of course, carried with it cruelty. Hot blood, generous impulses, sentimentality, were qualities he did not want for his business; and the

Cedarwild Animal School was business from the first tick of the clock to the last bite of the lash. In short, Harris Collins, in the totality of results, was guilty of causing more misery and pain to animals than all laboratories of vivisection in Christendom.

And into this animal hell Michael descended--although his arrival was horizontal, across three thousand five hundred miles, in the same crate in which he had been placed at the New Washington Hotel in Seattle. Never once had he been out of the crate during the entire journey, and filthiness, as well as wretchedness, characterized his condition. Thanks to his general good health, the wound of the amputated toe was in the process of uneventful healing. But dirt clung to him, and he was infested with fleas.

Cedarwild, to look at, was anything save a hell. Velvet lawns, gravelled walks and drives, and flowers formally growing, led up to the group of long low buildings, some of frame and some of concrete. But Michael was not received by Harris Collins, who, at the moment, sat in his private office, Harry Del Mar's last telegram on his desk, writing a memorandum to his secretary to query the railroad and the express companies for the whereabouts of a dog, crated and shipped by one, Harry Del Mar, from Seattle and consigned to Cedarwild. It was a pallid-eyed youth of eighteen in overalls who received Michael, receipted for him to the expressman, and carried his crate into a slope-floored concrete room that smelled offensively and chemically clean.

Michael was impressed by his surroundings but not attracted by the youth, who rolled up his sleeves and encased himself in large oilskin apron before he opened the crate. Michael sprang out and staggered about on legs which had not walked for days. This particular two-legged god was uninteresting. He was as cold as the concrete floor, as methodical as a machine; and in such fashion he went about the washing, scrubbing, and disinfecting of Michael. For Harris Collins was scientific and antiseptic to the last word in his handling of animals, and Michael was scientifically made clean, without deliberate harshness, but without any slightest hint of gentleness or consideration.

Naturally, he did not understand. On top of all he had already experienced, not even knowing executioners and execution chambers, for all he knew this bare room of cement and chemical smell might well be the place of the ultimate life-disaster and this youth the god who was to send him into the dark which had engulfed all he had known and loved. What Michael did know beyond the shadow of any doubt was that it was all coldly ominous and terribly strange. He endured the hand of the youth-god on the scruff of his neck, after the collar had been unbuckled; but when the hose was turned on him, he resented and resisted. The youth, merely working by formula, tightened the safe grip on the scruff of Michael's neck and lifted him clear of the floor, at the same time, with the other hand, directing the stream of water into his mouth and increasing it to full force by the nozzle control. Michael fought, and was well drowned for his pains, until he gasped and strangled helplessly.

After that he resisted no more, and was washed out and scrubbed out and cleansed out with the hose, a big bristly brush, and much carbolic soap, the lather of which got into and stung his eyes and nose, causing him to weep copiously and sneeze violently. Apprehensive of what might at any moment happen to him, but by this time aware that the youth was neither positive nor negative for kindness or harm, Michael continued to endure without further battling, until, clean and comfortable, he was put away into a pen, sweet and wholesome, where he slept and for the time being forgot. The place was the hospital, or segregation ward, and a week of imprisonment was spent therein, in which nothing happened in the way of development of germ diseases, and nothing happened to him except regular good food, pure drinking-water, and absolute isolation from contact with all life save the youth-god who, like an automaton, attended on him.

Michael had yet to meet Harris Collins, although, from a distance, often he heard his voice, not loud, but very imperative. That the owner of this voice was a high god, Michael knew from the first sound of it. Only a high god, a master over ordinary gods, could be so imperative. Will was in that voice, and accustomedness to command. Any dog would have so decided as quickly as Michael did. And any dog would have decided that there was no love nor loveliness in the god behind the voice, nothing to warm one's heart nor to adore.