

CHAPTER XXVII

"The thing is, Johnny, you can't love dogs into doing professional tricks, which is the difference between dogs and women," Collins told his assistant. "You know how it is with any dog. You love it up into lying down and rolling over and playing dead and all such dub tricks. And then one day you show him off to your friends, and the conditions are changed, and he gets all excited and foolish, and you can't get him to do a thing. Children are like that. Lose their heads in company, forget all their training, and throw you down."

"Now on the stage, they got real tricks to do, tricks they don't do, tricks they hate. And they mightn't be feeling good--got a touch of cold, or mange, or are sour-balled. What are you going to do? Apologize to the audience? Besides, on the stage, the programme runs like clockwork. Got to start performing on the tick of the clock, and anywhere from one to seven turns a day, all depending what kind of time you've got. The point is, your dogs have got to get right up and perform. No loving them, no begging them, no waiting on them. And there's only the one way. They've got to know when you start, you mean it."

"And dogs ain't fools," Johnny opined. "They know when you mean anything, an' when you don't."

"Sure thing," Collins nodded approbation. "The moment you slack up on them is the moment they slack up in their work. You get soft, and see how quick they begin making mistakes in their tricks. You've got to keep the fear of God over them. If you don't, they won't, and you'll find yourself begging for spotted time on the bush circuits."

Half an hour later, Michael heard, though he understood no word of it, the master-trainer laying another law down to another assistant.

"Cross-breds and mongrels are what's needed, Charles. Not one thoroughbred in ten makes good, unless he's got the heart of a coward, and that's just what distinguishes them from mongrels and cross-breds. Like race-horses, they're hot-blooded. They've got sensitiveness, and pride. Pride's the worst. You listen to me. I was born into the business and I've studied it all my life. I'm a success. There's only one reason I'm a success--I KNOW. Get that. I KNOW."

"Another thing is that cross-breds and mongrels are cheap. You needn't be afraid of losing them or working them out. You can always get more, and cheap. And they ain't the trouble in teaching. You can throw the fear of God into them. That's what's the matter with the thoroughbreds. You can't throw the fear of God into them."

"Give a mongrel a real licking, and what's he do? He'll kiss your hand, and be obedient, and crawl on his belly to do what you want him to do. They're slave dogs, that's what mongrels are. They ain't got courage,

and you don't want courage in a performing dog. You want fear. Now you give a thoroughbred a licking and see what happens. Sometimes they die. I've known them to die. And if they don't die, what do they do? Either they go stubborn, or vicious, or both. Sometimes they just go to biting and foaming. You can kill them, but you can't keep them from biting and foaming. Or they'll go straight stubborn. They're the worst. They're the passive resisters--that's what I call them. They won't fight back. You can flog them to death, but it won't buy you anything. They're like those Christians that used to be burned at the stake or boiled in oil. They've got their opinions, and nothing you can do will change them. They'll die first. . . . And they do. I've had them. I was learning myself . . . and I learned to leave the thoroughbred alone. They beat you out. They get your goat. You never get theirs. And they're time-wasters, and patience-wasters, and they're expensive."

"Take this terrier here." Collins nodded at Michael, who stood several feet back of him, morosely regarding the various activities of the arena. "He's both kinds of a thoroughbred, and therefore no good. I've never given him a real licking, and I never will. It would be a waste of time. He'll fight if you press him too hard. And he'll die fighting you. He's too sensible to fight if you don't press him too hard. And if you don't press him too hard, he'll just stay as he is, and refuse to learn anything. I'd chuck him right now, except Del Mar couldn't make a mistake. Poor Harry knew he had a specially, and a crackerjack, and it's up to me to find it."

"Wonder if he's a lion dog," Charles suggested.

"He's the kind that ain't afraid of lions," Collins concurred. "But what sort of a specially trick could he do with lions? Stick his head in their mouths? I never heard of a dog doing that, and it's an idea. But we can try him. We've tried him at 'most everything else."

"There's old Hannibal," said Charles. "He used to take a woman's head in his mouth with the old Sales-Sinker shows."

"But old Hannibal's getting cranky," Collins objected. "I've been watching him and trying to get rid of him. Any animal is liable to go off its nut any time, especially wild ones. You see, the life ain't natural. And when they do, it's good night. You lose your investment, and, if you don't know your business, maybe your life."

And Michael might well have been tried out on Hannibal and have lost his head inside that animal's huge mouth, had not the good fortune of aproposness intervened. For, the next moment, Collins was listening to the hasty report of his lion-and-tiger keeper. The man who reported was possibly forty years of age, although he looked half as old again. He was a withered-faced man, whose face-lines, deep and vertical, looked as if they had been clawed there by some beast other than himself.

"Old Hannibal is going crazy," was the burden of his report.

"Nonsense," said Harris Collins. "It's you that's getting old. He's got your goat, that's all. I'll show it to you.--Come on along, all of you. We'll take fifteen minutes off of the work, and I'll show you a show never seen in the show-ring. It'd be worth ten thousand a week anywhere . . . only it wouldn't last. Old Hannibal would turn up his toes out of sheer hurt feelings.--Come on everybody! All hands! Fifteen minutes recess!"

And Michael followed at the heels of his latest and most terrible master, the twain leading the procession of employees and visiting professional animal men who trooped along behind. As was well known, when Harris Collins performed he performed only for the elite, for the hoi-polloi of the trained-animal world.

The lion-and-tiger man, who had clawed his own face with the beast-claws of his nature, whimpered protest when he saw his employer's preparation to enter Hannibal's cage; for the preparation consisted merely in equipping himself with a broom-handle.

Hannibal was old, but he was reputed the largest lion in captivity, and he had not lost his teeth. He was pacing up and down the length of his cage, heavily and swaying, after the manner of captive animals, when the unexpected audience erupted into the space before his cage. Yet he took no notice whatever, merely continuing his pacing, swinging his head from side to side, turning lithely at each end of his cage, with all the air of being bent on some determined purpose.

"That's the way he's been goin' on for two days," whimpered his keeper. "An' when you go near 'm, he just reaches for you. Look what he done to me." The man held up his right arm, the shirt and undershirt ripped to shreds, and red parallel grooves, slightly clotted with blood, showing where the claws had broken the skin. "An' I wasn't inside. He did it through the bars, with one swipe, when I was startin' to clean his cage. Now if he'd only roar, or something. But he never makes a sound, just keeps on goin' up an' down."

"Where's the key?" Collins demanded. "Good. Now let me in. And lock it afterward and take the key out. Lose it, forget it, throw it away. I'll have all the time in the world to wait for you to find it to let me out."

And Harris Collins, a sliver of a less than a light-weight man, who lived in mortal fear that at table the mother of his children would crown him with a plate of hot soup, went into the cage, before the critical audience of his employees and professional visitors, armed only with a broom-handle. Further, the door was locked behind him, and, the moment he was in, keeping a casual but alert eye on the pacing Hannibal, he reiterated his order to lock the door and remove the key.

Half a dozen times the lion paced up and down, declining to take any notice of the intruder. And then, when his back was turned as he went down the cage, Collins stepped directly in the way of his return path and stood still. Coming back and finding his way blocked, Hannibal did not

roar. His muscular movements sliding each into the next like so much silk of tawny hide, he struck at the obstacle that confronted his way. But Collins, knowing ahead of the lion what the lion was going to do, struck first, with the broom-handle rapping the beast on its tender nose. Hannibal recoiled with a flash of snarl and flashed back a second sweeping stroke of his mighty paw. Again he was anticipated, and the rap on his nose sent him into recoil.

"Got to keep his head down--that way lies safety," the master-trainer muttered in a low, tense voice.

"Ah, would you? Take it, then."

Hannibal, in wrath, crouching for a spring, had lifted his head. The consequent blow on his nose forced his head down to the floor, and the king of beasts, nose still to floor, backed away with mouth-snarls and throat-and-chest noises.

"Follow up," Collins enunciated, himself following, rapping the nose again sharply and accelerating the lion's backward retreat.

"Man is the boss because he's got the head that thinks," Collins preached the lesson; "and he's just got to make his head boss his body, that's all, so that he can think one thought ahead of the animal, and act one act ahead. Watch me get his goat. He ain't the hard case he's trying to make himself believe he is. And that idea, which he's just starting, has

got to be taken out of him. The broomstick will do it. Watch."

He backed the animal down the length of the cage, continually rapping at the nose and keeping it down to the floor.

"Now I'm going to pile him into the corner."

And Hannibal, snarling, growling, and spitting, ducking his head and with short paw-strokes trying to ward off the insistent broomstick, backed obediently into the corner, crumpled up his hind-parts, and tried to withdraw his corporeal body within itself in a pain-urged effort to make it smaller. And always he kept his nose down and himself harmless for a spring. In the thick of it he slowly raised his nose and yawned. Nor, because it came up slowly, and because Collins had anticipated the yawn by being one thought ahead of Hannibal in Hannibal's own brain, was the nose rapped.

"That's the goat," Collins announced, for the first time speaking in a hearty voice in which was no vibration of strain. "When a lion yawns in the thick of a fight, you know he ain't crazy. He's sensible. He's got to be sensible, or he'd be springing or lashing out instead of yawning. He knows he's licked, and that yawn of his merely says: 'I quit. For the I love of Mike leave me alone. My nose is awful sore. I'd like to get you, but I can't. I'll do anything you want, and I'll be dreadful good, but don't hit my poor sore nose.'

"But man is the boss, and he can't afford to be so easy. Drive the lesson home that you're boss. Rub it in. Don't stop when he quits. Make him swallow the medicine and lick the spoon. Make him kiss your foot on his neck holding him down in the dirt. Make him kiss the stick that's beaten him.--Watch!"

And Hannibal, the largest lion in captivity, with all his teeth, captured out of the jungle after he was full-grown, a veritable king of beasts, before the menacing broomstick in the hand of a sliver of a man, backed deeper and more crumpled together into the corner. His back was bowed up, the very opposite muscular position to that for a spring, while he drew his head more and more down and under his chest in utter abjectness, resting his weight on his elbows and shielding his poor nose with his massive paws, a single stroke of which could have ripped the life of Collins quivering from his body.

"Now he might be tricky," Collins announced, "but he's got to kiss my foot and the stick just the same. Watch!"

He lifted and advanced his left foot, not tentatively and hesitantly, but quickly and firmly, bringing it to rest on the lion's neck. The stick was poised to strike, one act ahead of the lion's next possible act, as Collins's mind was one thought ahead of the lion's next thought.

And Hannibal did the forecasted and predestined. His head flashed up, huge jaws distended, fangs gleaming, to sink into the slender, silken-

hosed ankle above the tan low-cut shoes. But the fangs never sank. They were scarcely started a fifth of the way of the distance, when the waiting broomstick rapped on his nose and made him sink it in the floor under his chest and cover it again with his paws.

"He ain't crazy," said Collins. "He knows, from the little he knows, that I know more than him and that I've got him licked to a fare-you-well. If he was crazy, he wouldn't know, and I wouldn't know his mind either, and I wouldn't be that one jump ahead of him, and he'd get me and mess the whole cage up with my insides."

He prodded Hannibal with the end of the broom-handle, after each prodding it for a stroke. And the great lion lay and roared in helplessness, and at each prod exposed his nose more and lifted it higher, until, at the end, his red tongue ran out between his fangs and licked the boot resting none too gently on his neck, and, after that, licked the broomstick that had administered all the punishment.

"Going to be a good lion now?" Collins demanded, roughly rubbing his foot back and forth on Hannibal's neck.

Hannibal could not refrain from growling his hatred.

"Going to be a good lion?" Collins repeated, rubbing his foot back and forth still more roughly.

And Hannibal exposed his nose and with his red tongue licked again the tan shoe and the slender, tan-silken ankle that he could have destroyed with one crunch.