

## CHAPTER XXX

No rough-and-ready surgery of the Del Mar sort obtained at Cedarwild, else Michael would not have lived. A real surgeon, skilful and audacious, came very close to vivisectioning him as he radically repaired the ruin of a shoulder, doing things he would not have dared with a human but which proved to be correct for Michael.

"He'll always be lame," the surgeon said, wiping his hands and gazing down at Michael, who lay, for the most part of him, a motionless prisoner set in plaster of Paris. "All the healing, and there's plenty of it, will have to be by first intention. If his temperature shoots up we'll have to put him out of his misery. What's he worth?"

"He has no tricks," Collins answered. "Possibly fifty dollars, and certainly not that now. Lame dogs are not worth teaching tricks to."

Time was to prove both men wrong. Michael was not destined to permanent lameness, although in after-years his shoulder was always tender, and, on occasion, when the weather was damp, he was compelled to ease it with a slight limp. On the other hand, he was destined to appreciate to a great price and to become the star performer Harry Del Mar had predicted of him.

In the meantime he lay for many weary days in the plaster and abstained

from raising a dangerous temperature. The care taken of him was excellent. But not out of love and affection was it given. It was merely a part of the system at Cedarwild which made the institution such a success. When he was taken out of the plaster, he was still denied that instinctive pleasure which all animals take in licking their wounds, for shrewdly arranged bandages were wrapped and buckled on him. And when they were finally removed, there were no wounds to lick; though deep in the shoulder was a pain that required months in which to die out.

Harris Collins bothered him no more with trying to teach him tricks, and, one day, loaned him as a filler-in to a man and woman who had lost three of their dog-troupe by pneumonia.

"If he makes out you can have him for twenty dollars," Collins told the man, Wilton Davis.

"And if he croaks?" Davis queried.

Collins shrugged his shoulders. "I won't sit up nights worrying about him. He's unteachable."

And when Michael departed from Cedarwild in a crate on an express wagon, he might well have never returned, for Wilton Davis was notorious among trained-animal men for his cruelty to dogs. Some care he might take of a particular dog with a particularly valuable trick, but mere fillers-in came too cheaply. They cost from three to five dollars apiece. Worse

than that, so far as he was concerned, Michael had cost nothing. And if he died it meant nothing to Davis except the trouble of finding another dog.

The first stage of Michael's new adventure involved no unusual hardship, despite the fact that he was so cramped in his crate that he could not stand up and that the jolting and handling of the crate sent countless twinges of pain shooting through his shoulder. The journey was only to Brooklyn, where he was duly delivered to a second-rate theatre, Wilton Davis being so indifferent a second-rate animal man that he could never succeed in getting time with the big circuits.

The hardship of the cramped crate began after Michael had been carried into a big room above the stage and deposited with nearly a score of similarly crated dogs. A sorry lot they were, all of them scrubs and most of them spirit-broken and miserable. Several had bad sores on their heads from being knocked about by Davis. No care was taken of these sores, and they were not improved by the whitening that was put on them for concealment whenever they performed. Some of them howled lamentably at times, and every little while, as if it were all that remained for them to do in their narrow cells, all of them would break out into barking.

Michael was the only one who did not join in these choruses. Long since, as one feature of his developing moroseness, he had ceased from barking. He had become too unsociable for any such demonstrations; nor did he

pattern after the example of some of the sourer-tempered dogs in the room, who were for ever bickering and snarling through the slats of their cages. In fact, Michael's sourness of temper had become too profound even for quarrelling. All he desired was to be let alone, and of this he had a surfeit for the first forty-eight hours.

Wilton Davis had assembled his troupe ahead of time, so that the change of programme was five days away. Having taken advantage of this to go to see his wife's people over in New Jersey, he had hired one of the stage-hands to feed and water his dogs. This the stage-hand would have done, had he not had the misfortune to get into an altercation with a barkeeper which culminated in a fractured skull and an ambulance ride to the receiving hospital. To make the situation perfect for what followed, the theatre was closed for three days in order to make certain alterations demanded by the Fire Commissioners.

No one came near the room, and after several hours Michael grew aware of hunger and thirst. The time passed, and the desire for food was supplanted by the desire for water. By nightfall the barking and yelping became continuous, changing through the long night hours to whimpering and whining. Michael alone made no sound, suffering dumbly in the bedlam of misery.

Morning of the second day dawned; the slow hours dragged by to the second night; and the darkness of the second night drew down upon a scene behind the scenes, sufficient of itself to condemn all trained-animal acts in

all theatres and show-tents of all the world. Whether Michael dreamed or was in semi-delirium, there is no telling; but, whichever it was, he lived most of his past life over again. Again he played as a puppy on the broad verandas of Mister Haggin's plantation bungalow at Meringe; or, with Jerry, stalked the edges of the jungle down by the river-bank to spy upon the crocodiles; or, learning from Mister Haggin and Bob, and patterning after Bidy and Terrence, to consider black men as lesser and despised gods who must for ever be kept strictly in their places.

On the schooner Eugenie he sailed with Captain Kellar, his second master, and on the beach at Tulagi lost his heart to Steward of the magic fingers and sailed away with him and Kwaque on the steamer Makambo. Steward was most in his visions, against a hazy background of vessels, and of individuals like the Ancient Mariner, Simon Nishikanta, Grimshaw, Captain Doane, and little old Ah Moy. Nor least of all did Scraps appear, and Cocky, the valiant-hearted little fluff of life gallantly bearing himself through his brief adventure in the sun. And it would seem to Michael that on one side, clinging to him, Cocky talked farrago in his ear, and on the other side Sara clung to him and chattered an interminable and incommunicable tale. And then, deep about the roots of his ears would seem to prod the magic, caressing fingers of Steward the beloved.

"I just don't I have no luck," Wilton Davis mourned, gazing about at his dogs, the air still vibrating with the string of oaths he had at first ripped out.

"That comes of trusting a drunken stage-hand," his wife remarked placidly. "I wouldn't be surprised if half of them died on us now."

"Well, this is no time for talk," Davis snarled, proceeding to take off his coat. "Get busy, my love, and learn the worst. Water's what they need. I'll give them a tub of it."

Bucketful by bucketful, from the tap at the sink in the corner, he filled a large galvanized-iron tub. At sound of the running water the dogs began whimpering and yelping and moaning. Some tried to lick his hands with their swollen tongues as he dragged them roughly out of their cages. The weaker ones crawled and bellied toward the tub, and were over-trod by the stronger ones. There was not room for all, and the stronger ones drank first, with much fighting and squabbling and slashing of fangs. Into the foremost of this was Michael, slashing and being slashed, but managing to get hasty gulps of the life-saving fluid. Davis danced about among them, kicking right and left, so that all might have a chance. His wife took a hand, laying about her with a mop. It was a pandemonium of pain, for, their parched throats softened by the water, they were again able to yelp and cry out loudly all their hurt and woe.

Several were too weak to get to the water, so it was carried to them and doused and splashed into their mouths. It seemed that they would never be satisfied. They lay in collapse all about the room, but every little while one or another would crawl over to the tub and try to drink more.

In the meantime Davis had started a fire and filled a caldron with potatoes.

"The place stinks like a den of skunks," Mrs. Davis observed, pausing from dabbing the end of her nose with a powder-puff. "Dearest, we'll just have to wash them."

"All right, sweetheart," her husband agreed. "And the quicker the better. We can get through with it while the potatoes are boiling and cooling. I'll scrub them and you dry them. Remember that pneumonia, and do it thoroughly."

It was quick, rough bathing. Reaching out for the dogs nearest him, he flung them in turn into the tub from which they had drunk. When they were frightened, or when they objected in any way, he rapped them on the head with the scrubbing brush or the bar of yellow laundry soap with which he was lathering them. Several minutes sufficed for a dog.

"Drink, damn you, drink--have some more," he would say, as he shoved their heads down and under the dirty, soapy water.

He seemed to hold them responsible for their horrible condition, to look upon their filthiness as a personal affront.

Michael yielded to being flung into the tub. He recognized that baths were necessary and compulsory, although they were administered in much

better fashion at Cedarwild, while Kwaque and Steward had made a sort of love function of it when they bathed him. So he did his best to endure the scrubbing, and all might have been well had not Davis soused him under. Michael jerked his head up with a warning growl. Davis suspended half-way the blow he was delivering with the heavy brush, and emitted a low whistle of surprise.

"Hello!" he said. "And look who's here!--Lovey, this is the Irish terrier I got from Collins. He's no good. Collins said so. Just a fill-in.--Get out!" he commanded Michael. "That's all you get now, Mr. Fresh Dog. But take it from me pretty soon you'll be getting it fast enough to make you dizzy."

While the potatoes were cooling, Mrs. Davis kept the hungry dogs warned away by sharp cries. Michael lay down sullenly to one side, and took no part in the rush for the trough when permission was given. Again Davis danced among them, kicking away the stronger and the more eager.

"If they get to fighting after all we've done for them, kick in their ribs, lovey," he told his wife.

"There! You would, would you?"--this to a large black dog, accompanied by a savage kick in the side. The animal yelped its pain as it fled away, and, from a safe distance, looked on piteously at the steaming food.



"Well, after this they can't say I don't never give my dogs a bath," Davis remarked from the sink, where he was rinsing his arms. "What d'ye say we call it a day's work, my dear?" Mrs. Davis nodded agreement. "We can rehearse them to-morrow and next day. That will be plenty of time. I'll run in to-night and boil them some bran. They'll need an extra meal after fasting two days."

The potatoes finished, the dogs were put back in their cages for another twenty-four hours of close confinement. Water was poured into their drinking-tins, and, in the evening, still in their cages, they were served liberally with boiled bran and dog-biscuit. This was Michael's first food, for he had sulkily refused to go near the potatoes.

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The rehearsing took place on the stage, and for Michael trouble came at the very start. The drop-curtain was supposed to go up and reveal the twenty dogs seated on chairs in a semi-circle. Because, while they were being thus arranged, the preceding turn was taking place in front of the drop-curtain, it was imperative that rigid silence should be kept. Next, when the curtain rose on full stage, the dogs were trained to make a great barking.

As a filler-in, Michael had nothing to do but sit on a chair. But he had to get upon the chair, first, and when Davis so ordered him he accompanied the order with a clout on the side of the head. Michael

growled warningly.

"Oh, ho, eh?" the man sneered. "It's Fresh Dog looking for trouble. Well, you might as well get it over with now so your name can be changed to Good Dog.--My dear, just keep the rest of them in order while I teach Fresh Dog lesson number one."

Of the beating that followed, the least said the better. Michael put up a fight that was hopeless, and was thoroughly beaten in return. Bruised and bleeding, he sat on the chair, taking no part in the performance and only sullenly engendering a deeper and bitterer sourness. To keep silent before the curtain went up was no hardship for him. But when the curtain did go up, he declined to join the rest of the dogs in their frantic barking and yelping.

The dogs, sometimes alone and sometimes in couples and trios and groups, left their chairs at command and performed the conventional dog tricks such as walking on hind-legs, hopping, limping, waltzing, and throwing somersaults. Wilton Davis's temper was short and his hand heavy throughout the rehearsal, as the shrill yelps of pain from the lagging and stupid attested.

In all, during that day and the forenoon of the next, three long rehearsals took place. Michael's troubles ceased for the time being. At command, he silently got on the chair and silently sat there. "Which shows, dearest, what a bit of the stick will do," Davis bragged to his

wife. Nor did the pair of them dream of the scandalizing part Michael was going to play in their first performance.

Behind the curtain all was ready on the full stage. The dogs sat on their chairs in abject silence with Davis and his wife menacing them to remain silent, while, in front of the curtain, Dick and Daisy Bell delighted the matinee audience with their singing and dancing. And all went well, and no one in the audience would have suspected the full stage of dogs behind the curtain had not Dick and Daisy, accompanied by the orchestra, begun to sing "Roll Me Down to Rio."

Michael could not help it. Even as Kwaque had long before mastered him by the jews' harp, and Steward by love, and Harry Del Mar by the harmonica, so now was he mastered by the strains of the orchestra and the voices of the man and woman lifting the old familiar rhythm, taught him by Steward, of "Roll Me Down to Rio." Despite himself, despite his sullenness, the forces compulsive opened his jaws and set all his throat vibrating in accompaniment.

From beyond the curtain came a titter of children and women that grew into a roar and drowned out the voices of Dick and Daisy. Wilton Davis cursed unbelievably as he sprang down the stage to Michael. But Michael howled on, and the audience laughed on. Michael was still howling when the short club smote him. The shock and hurt of it made him break off and yelp an involuntary cry of pain.

"Knock his block off, dearest," Mrs. Davis counselled.

And then ensued battle royal. Davis struck shrewd blows that could be heard, as were heard the snarls and growls of Michael. The audience, under the sway of the comic, ignored Dick and Daisy Bell. Their turn was spoiled. The Davis turn was "queered," as Wilton impressed it. Michael's block was knocked off within the meaning of the term. And the audience, on the other side of the curtain, was edified and delighted.

Dick and Daisy could not continue. The audience wanted what was behind the curtain, not in front of it. Michael was taken off stage thoroughly throttled by one of the stage-hands, and the curtain arose on the full set--full, save for the one empty chair. The boys in the audience first realized the connection between the empty chair and the previous uproar, and began clamouring for the absent dog. The audience took up the cry, the dogs barked more excitedly, and five minutes of hilarity delayed the turn which, when at last started, was marked by rustiness and erraticness on the part of the dogs and by great peevishness on the part of Wilton Davis.

"Never mind, honey," his imperturbable wife assured him in a stage whisper. "We'll just ditch that dog and get a regular one. And, anyway, we've put one over on that Daisy Bell. I ain't told you yet what she said about me, only last week, to some of my friends."

Several minutes later, still on the stage and handling his animals, the

husband managed a chance to mutter to his wife: "It's the dog. It's him I'm after. I'm going to lay him out."

"Yes, dearest," she agreed.

The curtain down, with a gleeful audience in front and with the dogs back in the room over the stage, Wilton Davis descended to look for Michael, who, instead of cowering in some corner, stood between the legs of the stage-hand, quivering yet from his mishandling and threatening to fight as hard as ever if attacked. On his way, Davis encountered the song-and-dance couple. The woman was in a tearful rage, the man in a dry one.

"You're a peach of a dog man, you are," he announced belligerently.

"Here's where you get yours."

"You keep away from me, or I'll lay you out," Wilton Davis responded desperately, brandishing a short iron bar in his right hand. "Besides, you just wait if you want to, and I'll lay you out afterward. But first of all I'm going to lay out that dog. Come on along and see--damn him! How was I to know? He was a new one. He never peeped in rehearsal. How was I to know he was going to yap when we arranged the set behind you?"

"You've raised hell," the manager of the theatre greeted Davis, as the latter, trailed by Dick Bell, came upon Michael bristling from between the legs of the stage-hand.

"Nothing to what I'm going to raise," Davis retorted, shortening his grip on the iron bar and raising it. "I'm going to kill 'm. I'm going to beat the life out of him. You just watch."

Michael snarled acknowledgment of the threat, crouched to spring, and kept his eyes on the iron weapon.

"I just guess you ain't goin' to do anything of the sort," the stage-hand assured Davis.

"It's my property," the latter asserted with an air of legal convincingness.

"And against it I'm goin' to stack up my common sense," was the stage-hand's reply. "You tap him once, and see what you'll get. Dogs is dogs, and men is men, but I'm damned if I know what you are. You can't pull off rough stuff on that dog. First time he was on a stage in his life, after being starved and thirsted for two days. Oh, I know, Mr. Manager."

"If you kill the dog it'll cost you a dollar to the garbage man to get rid of the carcass," the manager took up.

"I'll pay it gladly," Davis said, again lifting the iron bar. "I've got some come-back, ain't I?"

"You animal guys make me sick," the stage-hand uttered. "You just make

me draw the line somewheres. And here it is: you tap him once with that baby crowbar, and I'll tap you hard enough to lose me my job and to send you to hospital."

"Now look here, Jackson . . ." the manager began threateningly.

"You can't say nothin' to me," was the retort. "My mind's made up. If that cheap guy lays a finger on that dog I'm just sure goin' to lose my job. I'm gettin tired anyway of seein' these skates beatin' up their animals. They've made me sick clean through."

The manager looked to Davis and shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"There's no use pulling off a rough-house," he counselled. "I don't want to lose Jackson and he'll put you into hospital if he ever gets started. Send the dog back where you got him. Your wife's told me about him. Stick him into a box and send him back collect. Collins won't mind. He'll take the singing out of him and work him into something."

Davis, with another glance at the truculent Jackson, wavered.

"I'll tell you what," the manager went on persuasively. "Jackson will attend to the whole thing, box him up, ship him, everything--won't you, Jackson?"

The stage-hand nodded curtly, then reached down and gently caressed

Michael's bruised head.

"Well," Davis gave in, turning on his heel, "they can make fools of themselves over dogs, them that wants to. But when they've been in the business as long as I have . . . "