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RULING PASSIONS

By Edwin J. Webster

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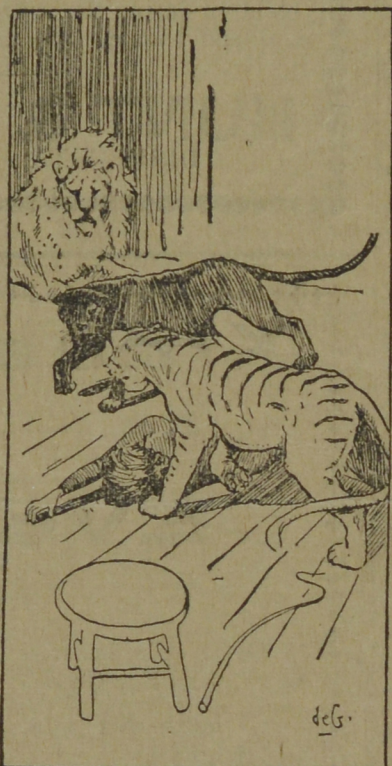
Chita, the big black panther, was growling sullenly, his growl occasionally rising to a snarl of exasperated, jealous rage. His mistress, Carmen, dainty, pretty, from appearances very far from being a person capable of ruling and restraining the big, fierce cat animals of the circus, was standing in front of his cage.

Ordinarily the sight of Carmen caused the big panther to set up an affectionate purring. But on the present occasion Tom Howard, the best athlete in the great circus, was talking to the pretty Carmen. It was plain even to a black panther that the interest Howard took in Carmen was more than friendly. It was also plain that Carmen was far from displeased at this interest. And that was the reason the big panther was growling, for a deep and consuming jealousy of stalwart Tom Howard filled Chita's heart.

Just then a warning bell rang. This was the signal for Carmen to get ready for her great "animal school act." Her scholars were not rosy cheeked boys and girls, but a very grim looking set of pupils, consisting of Chita, the big Bengal tiger and Diogenes, the sleepy but big maned, strong jawed Numidian lion.

In this act each of the great felines left his own cage and entered a larger one in which Carmen was seated on a low chair, a small rod, the symbol of her authority, in her hand. Chita trotted willingly into this cage. He was devoted to Carmen, and now that Tom Howard was out of sight there was nothing to disturb his good nature.

The Numidian lion walked into the cage in a lazy, nonchalant manner. He evidently looked on the whole thing as a bore. But he had eaten a good dinner, felt at peace with the world, and, anyhow, it would soon be over. As he took his place he looked at the crowd with languid curiosity, yawned and acted like a lion who considered a



THE IMPACT OF THE SHOCK THREW CARMEN TO THE FLOOR.

school for a lion of his years as a nuisance, but not enough of a one to make a fuss over.

But the big Bengal tiger evidently was in an ugly frame of mind. At first he refused to enter the cage. Carmen struck him lightly with her whip. Like a flash the big lips curled up, showing the long, sharp tiger fangs, and at the same time he gave a snarl of rage, low and rumbling at first, but rising until it re-echoed from every part of the circus tent. But Carmen looked him steadily in the eye, and after a moment's hesitation the great striped beast slunk to his place. It was plain that he was in a dangerous mood.

Despite the tiger's bad temper the lesson would probably have gone on as usual had not Tom Howard happened to step beyond the entrance of the covered way leading to the quarters of the circus people when they are not in the rings. Tom was always intensely worried when Carmen was giving her animal school act. It was this anxiety which led him to leave the circus quarters. But his well meant consideration proved costly.

As Tom stepped from the canvas covered passageway Chita saw him. The sight stirred the black panther's smoldering jealousy. He stooped abruptly in his role as Carmen's pupil, jumped off the pedestal on which he had been sitting at "attention" and sent forth a fierce, snarling growl in which he expressed his hatred of the man whom he felt had usurped first place in his mistress' heart.

At the first notes of the angry snarl Carmen turned reprovingly to the black panther. She knew there was not the least danger of her pet attacking her, but he must go on with his performance or the act would be a failure.

"Chita," she said in reproachful tones, looking straight into the angry panther's eyes, and as she did this she turned her back on the still sullen Bengal tiger.

The big tiger had been growing more and more sulky as the act proceeded. His nerves were in a bad state, and the angry snarl of the panther had been the finishing touch. Now Carmen had taken her eyes off him. That settled it. He dropped from his pedestal to the floor of the cage, gathered himself for the spring and the next instant

was shooting through the air, a black and yellow bar of deadly energy.

The impact of the shock threw Carmen to the floor; but, quick as the Bengal tiger had been, the panther was quicker. All thought of jealousy vanished at sight of the attack on his mistress. Before the tiger could use tooth or claw the lithe, strong limbed panther had launched himself right at the tiger's throat.

Over and over on the floor of the cage the two great cats rolled. Ordinarily the panther would have been no match for the far larger tiger, but the panther had caught his grip first, settling his sharp, deep biting teeth in the tiger's throat. This prevented the tiger using his teeth effectually, but his claws, especially those on his strong hind legs, could be used. Again and again he struck out with them, ripping through the panther's skin like a soft glove. But he could not shake the deadly grip Chita had on his throat.

Although he might be torn to pieces by the great claws, Chita meant to hold on until he felt his teeth meet in his opponent's windpipe. And through all the terrible struggle Diogenes, the Numidian lion, sat on his pedestal, lazy, good natured, only calmly interested in the life and death fight of his fierce fellow pupils.

When the circus men separated the two big cats the Bengal tiger was dead, and the black panther, torn in twenty places, was dying. Carmen was unhurt, except for a few slight bruises caused by her fall on the floor of the cage. Tom Howard was foremost among the crowd which had rushed to the cage. As Carmen placed her hand on the head of the big panther who had died to save her Chita opened his great yellow eyes, now fast dimming in death. But even in death the ruling

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position of his nerve with animal nature held strong. His eyes brightened with affection at the sight of Carmen. Then his glance fell on Tom Howard. The jealous snarl started from deep down in his throat. He half raised his head; then it sank down, and the black panther's eyes closed forever.

And Diogenes, the big maned lion,

sat on his pedestal, calm, nonchalant, disinterested, aloof. He was waiting for the signal "School is over." It did not come. Diogenes waited a little longer. Then he opened his great jaws in a half suppressed yawn, dropped to the floor of the exhibition cage and trotted lazily off to the most comfortable corner of his own cage.

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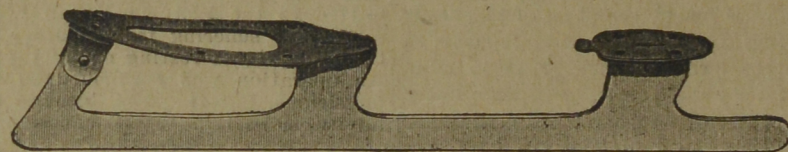
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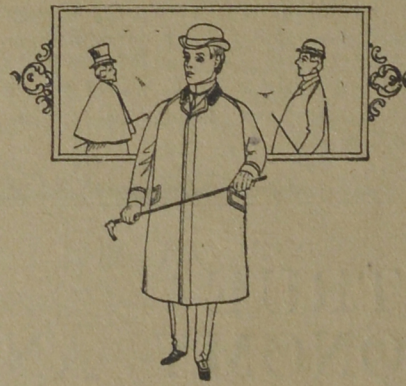
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