

"Don't Tom treat you right?"  
 "I can't talk about that, I jest wants to go home." Her voice died out into a whisper, and then she began to primp her face agin, drawed it this way and that, ondone it and primped it over, till the tears that she helt back come into vy own eyes. The po' little thing had

by me like she had padded claws for feet."

Pappy Corn was a romancer of the common life who introduced a preface wherever it was needed to save, or burmish his own character. He made a break now in his narration, fixed his eyes wittily upon his companion, and remarked with an air of indescribable cunning:

"Mister, there's a sight of underhand doin's in the moral world. Some of my best work there has been accomplished on the sly, not lettin' the victim's right hand know what my left was doin' to him. It's about the only way you can git the chance sometimes to twist the devil's tail. So I say, I've been willin' often to give advice in secret that somebody else was to act upon in the open. But that was one time when I regretted the enterprise of my own righteousness. Long to'ards sundown of the day I'd told the little lion tamer how to tame her husband, I begun to have fearful misgivin's. What if she was to load her pistol and bust loose at him sho' nough? Wouldn't I be the partner of her crime? Well, sir, the more I thought about it, the more my conscience griped me. There was but one thing to do—git up and dust over to Purcell's house and be on hand to stop the experiment, if I wa'n't already too late. So I hiked as fast as my old legs would carry me. It was down hill most of the way, and I was fairly flyin' as I come 'round the corner of the cabin and heard the first shot and sech a yell as I hope never to hear agin in this world. Mister, I couldn't go no further. I jest couldn't. My knees give way, and my innards turned cold in me."

"Lift up your right foot," I hears Dorime say, and then a growl. Bang! I heard the bullet pop agin' the flo', and then about a dozen yells from somethin' that sounded like a cross between a man and a wildcat.

"Dance," I hears her say agin, and another deep cussin' growl.

SPIT! SPING! BANG! BANK! And the bullets clatterin' everywhere.

"Dance, I say!" Then there was a lively shufflin' of a man's brogan shoes on the flo', and I crope up to the window to find out what new fangled kind of murder was bein' done inside.



"It was Purcell's wife, the po' little lion tamer, sittin' on the ground bar-footed, with her black hair hanging down and her hands clasped around her knees."

"Well, sir, I wished you could 'a been there to see it! The little lion tamer was standin' in the middle of the flo', one bare brown foot sprung forward, two pistols buckled around her waist and one in her hand. Her hair was hangin' down, her head thrown back, her eyes, not blazin', but dead black, cold and steady, and she had Tom hummed in a corner between 'em dancin' with a little stick she was wavin' in the other hand. His face was pale, kivered with sweat, and his eyes wild with fear. And

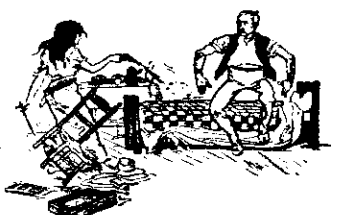
she kept him at it. When he'd sorter give down, like he was fixin' to stop, she'd level the pistol at some tender part of his body and squint along the barrel, and he'd fairly bound in the air. When she towed she'd wore him clean out, she says—

"Halt! jest that way, as if she was in a cage with half a dozen lions doin' what she told 'em

Tom halted, heavin' like a bellows and so skeert he dassent raise his hand to wipe his face.

"Git in bed," she says, p'intin' to'ards it with the stick. He walled his eyes sorter hongry at the table where she had a right smart supper laid out. Mister, she busted loose with that pistol first at his right, then at his left foot, bar'ly missin' 'em. Well, sir, he fairly riz from the flo' like he was flyin', landed in the middle of the bed, and jerked the kiver over him. Then she set down to the table, big as Ike, and begun to eat, with the pistol lyin' handy. I could see Tom watchin' her like a rabbit from a bresh heap, but he didn't so much as move his little finger, for fear he'd attract her attention. After a while he drapped off to sleep, and I crope around to the do' and scratched on it very easy. She opened it, and sechin' who I was she says as calm as you please:

"Good evening, Mr. Corn. Won't you come in?"



"Bang! I heard the bullets pop agin the flo', and then about a dozen yells from somethin' that sounded like a cross between a man and a wildcat."

"No'm," I says, "It's gittin' late. I jest wanted to see you on a little matter of business."

"What is it?" she ast.

"Dorime," I says, "I've been mighty oneasy since I give you that advice this mornin', and I wants to take it back."

"Well, you can't git it," she says laughin', "I've used it, and I find it's jest what I needs."

"Tell me this, honey, do you aim to kill Tom, or air you jest trainin' of him? Them pistols are loaded," I says.

"Mr. Corn, when a trainer goes into a cage where there is a vicious beast, she's got the right to kill him to save her own life. I don't fegger to kill Tom unless it's necessary. Good night." With that she shet the do' in my face.

"Well, sir, that was the beginnin' of the biggest rucus we ever had in Brass-town Valley. Even a mean man has his varmint pride, and Purcell was as game as ary beast Dorime had ever tackled. She took him by surprise that night, or he wouldn't 'a give in so easy. And it did seem that was one of the tricks she knowed about trainin' wild animals, for she kept on takin' him by surprise. The sawmill hands towed she set out on the mountain, trigger cocked, and watched for him so as to git the drap on him when she knowed he'd be comin' home drunk. I don't reckon it went as far as that, but it's a fact not a man in the settlement would pass that way after dark, for fear she'd mistake him for her lion and plug him. Some of the women begun to come by out of curiosity to see a woman that could keep on livin' with a man she shot at. But Dorime sorter give 'em the cold shoulder, seemed as if she was contented and happy like a person that has got back to a familiar callin', and didn't need company. And 'tain't no more'n jestice to say that Purcell was de-in' his darndest, puttin' up as good a fight as beast could with one paw ketched in the trap. That was the queerest part about it. No sooner did the gal show her lion tamin' side once more than he fell back, dead in love with her agin. He'd stay at home for days after they'd had one of their rippits lickin' ber hands, so to speak, plum carried away with her dangerousness. Then he'd take another header on Liquor Ridge, and it would all be to do over agin. What made me oneasy was the change in Dorime. Seemed as if she never knowed a straw for him after she saw him skeert and conquered that first

time. Seemed as if she was jest sorter followin' her profession by livin' with him. There wa'n't a feelin' in her heart to keep her from killin' him if it came to a draw between 'em, and she got the upper hand. I've sometimes wondered since I studied out Tom Purcell's wife what would happen in this world if the advantage lay with the women same's as it do now with the men. The best of 'em air apt to be terrible unscrupulous where they git the drap on you.

"After a while we got use to the way the Purcells took one another for better or for worse, same as you'd git use to a squattin' volcano if you'd lived a long time on its back. And so I was no ways prepared for the finish of this tale I'm tellin' you.

"One evenin' as I was comin' home late from Bud Sockwell's I passed by Purcell's cabin, and lookin' over in the paster I seen somethin'. There was an old dried well in the middle of the paster with the shelter and windlass still over it, but the box had been took away, and, there bein' no cattle about, it was left open. Now, settin' on the edge of this well was Tom's two fox hounds. They had their noses in the air, and you never heard sech howlin' as they were doin', regular mournin' duet. While I stood lookin' at 'em and wonderin' what the fuss meant, I heard another sound, a holler human howl that seemed to come up out of the very bowels of the earth. The dogs drapped back, commenced wagin' their tails and whinin' and lookin' expectant down in the well. There wa'n't another sign of life about the place. And while I was makin' up my mind what to do, that sound come agin. So I clum over the fence, sneaked up to the well, kicked the dogs away and squatted on the rim. I couldn't see a thing, but jest then that awful cry come up, and I might nigh fell in, it skeert me so.

"Who's there?" I says.

"Is that you, Pappy?" says a voice so hoarse it was terrible to hear.

"This is William Corn," I says. "Who air you? For I wa'n't aimin' to encourage a dead man to call me Pappy."

"It's me, Tom Purcell," says the voice.

"Goddemighly, Tom! I says, 'how come you down there?'

"Pappy," he says, beginnin' to sob and take on, "you jest git me out. I been in here since night before last, and I had all that time to think about dyin' with these lizards and toads lookin' at me, and no water, and—O my God! it's been like havin' delirium tremens in my grave."

"Then he commenced howlin' agin, and the dogs they turned up their noses and begun too, and I was so distracted I hardly had sense enough to ketch hold of the windlass and let the rope down in the well. I had him up in no time after he called out for me to draw. Mister, a dead man could have come up out of his grave in better shape. He was kivered with dirt, his hair had turned white, his eyes were sunk deep in his head and bloodshot, his lips was cracked with thirst. He drapped down all of a heap on the ground, and I ran to fetch some water. When I got back he was layin' there with the hounds lickin' his face. 'Twas an awful sight, him givin' out them hoarse sobs, and bein' glad of the fellowship of the dogs. After a while I got him up to the house into the bed,



"While I stood lookin' at 'em and wonderin' what the fuss meant, I heard another sound, a holler human howl that seemed to come up out of the very bowels of the earth."



"And settin' on the seat was a woman in pink tights, a green skirt not much longer than an exclamation p'int, and about four thousand spangles."

Some her best and none of us had helped, jest left her to have it out with that devil-livered Tom Purcell without a word of sympathy, and now she was homeseck for her lions, and for her cussin' circus folks.

"Honey," I says, very kind, "I ain't got the money, and if I had, I wouldn't lend it to you so you could go away and leave your husband. When folks marry, in here, it's for what better there is, and for all the worse that can be." She hung her head, and I towed she was fixin' to cry agin, so I hurried on. "But I can tell you how to straighten Tom."

"How?"

"Wa'n't you a lion tamer befor' you married?"

"Yes."

"What's the most important thing in that business?"

"Not to be afeerd of the beasts and to make them afeerd of you. That's the rule," she says, lookin' at me so much as to say, "What's that got to do with it?"

"It's a good rule. If you was to practice it on Tom a week he'd be as tame as a kitten." She looked downcast at that.

"Mr. Corn," she says, "a lion is just a lion. I ain't afeerd of no lion that walks because I understand 'em. I knows when to pet one and when to stick a hot iron to him. But, Tom, he's a man—and he's got me in the cage." She wailed, drappag back on the ground.

"You listen to me, Dorime," I says, gittin' down to her first name, "a man's a man when he's a man. When he ain't, he's a beast same as any other, and he's to be managed by the same methods. Now, what would you 'a done if one of your lions had so much as snapped his jaws and backed his years at you when it wa'n't in the play for him to do so?"

"I'd have struck him across the nose with my whip, or shot off my pistol at him, or struck a hot poker to him, accordin' to his disposition."

"Exactly," I says, very encouragin', "the pistol and hot poker would suit Tom's nature best. Now you git up and go back home, and be ready for him when he comes in to-night. The minute he begins to rar, don't be skeert, think he's jest one of your beasts lashin' his side with his tail and axin' to spring, and act accordin', and act first."

"Mister, you never see anythin' grow like that po' gal did under them inspirin' words. She ran up, stiffened up, and stretched herself."

"Mr. Corn," she says, "I believe you air right. I'll take your advice. I'm obbeeged to you."

"You are welcome, ma'am," I says bakin' off my hat to her as she stepped