



Quair fer Pol'cats

by
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Not naow, Rosie!

Loft yore tail up if'n you likes, but don't let hit fly 'til you heers th' word hollered!

Lowlanders air pow'rful hard to convince they ain't welcome. By-grabbies, this'un ain't a'leavin 'til he's told!

Soon's yore hands air tied, stranger, like yore feet, 'Tunia'll be tuckin 'er tail back down, bein as Rosie's hold'n you fer safty's sake. 'Sides Rosie gets pleasure from hit!

There. One more notch an' you'll be tuckered under as good as old Granny's hawg at butcherin time. Heh! Heh! Heh! You gits turned o'er now an' pinted t'ward Divil's Horn Peak. See hit out'n thar?

Don't swaller that tale 'bout th' divil a'paintin his pitcher there, leavin his eyes cut out'n th' hills an a'pintin at McGregor's land. Them air stones what looks like eyes. 'Sides, if'n McGregor's don't cotton to such magics talk, why should you? Th' divil ain't a'pintin at yore valley, air he?

"Tunia! Ye bin told to tucker yore tail down. No sense in Rosie an you both a'strainin. Heh! Heh! She's kinder techy thetaways. Whatever Rosie does, 'Tunia seems moughty a'quiverin to do, too.

Yore head's a'turnin to McGregor Mountain naow, hain't hit? Purty sight, hain't hit? What with green leaves, air so clean, clouds a'scudding by agin th' blue sky, an smell of hickory smoke sorta weaved in with th' chitterin of th' Hilley-lark, hit's down right peace'ful, hain't hit?

Wal', jest take yorse'f a good look, 'cause that's whar th' McGregor's settl'd fer keeps nigh onto twenty first-birthins ago, granny counts.

Naow, swing yore haid 'round. See Tall-man Hill? That's McGregor land, too. Then there's Hangin Man Peak, Cutter's Knob . . . No! No! Swing yore haid back t'other way! Jes yonder o'er Divil's Horn Peak th' right -- see Cutter's Knob o'er thetaway? Purty e'en 'tween th' haze, hain't hit?

Naow twist yore haid further an rest yore peepers on Su'cide Cliff. Tain't a real cliff. Folks just got so's they called hit thet when Samu'l McGregor shot down a passel of lowlanders agin that flat hillside o'er there. Oh, that was nine or ten first-birthins ago. Gray or brown agin tree-green 'peers moughty near like a store bought pitchur, don't hit? Samu'l warn't warranted naiter. Heh! Heh!

Twist yore neck jus a leetle more in th' same direction.

No! No! Stop hit Rosie! He ain't a'gittin away! He's just a'turnin so's he kin peer o'er that rock down by his cheek to see Hang Man's Saddle. Don't worry none, flatlander, she won't hit you agin 'til th' word be given!

Wal' ye've seed hit, an McGregor's land be named! Allus 'ceptin th' knob yore a'layin on. That's McGregor's too -- you could of told yorese'f by th' tastes in yore mouth when yore face was diggen the dirt and being tied. Heh! Heh! E'en th' tastes tell you hits name be Pol'cat Hill!

Don't pucker yore nose so. McGregor first-borns have stood hit fer nigh onto twelve first-birthins away. That wud'a hit near se'enteen an sixty 'cordin to lowlander count, tho' McGregor's think such cipherin air puttin on airs. What else could lowlanders do but put on airs, a'talkin about when they comes over on the Mayflower, and such.

Looky thet! 'Tunia's a'walkin o'er to th' ridge yonder. Lowlanders ain't made fer such beauty sights -- glossy black, corn-silky hair printed with two shiny white stripes from fo'head to tail-tip, jest a'weavin an a'wigglin as she sashays along. Here, move yore haid upwards so's you kin share the' sight. Say hit, lowlander! Say hit! Ain't that a beauty sightin!

'Course hit air a leetle early to be a'meeting up with her mate fer next year -- p'raps Lemu'l or Gharkin air back this time. Heh! They hain't bin near these parts in a coon's age. Las' time, 'Tunia there -- only that ain't her realist name -- 'Tunia Ol'anders seems a leetle long to say o'er and o'er -- especially when



ye knows one 'nother right well, don't hit? Heh! Wal', she brung home th' stranger las' year -- prob'ly from th' lowlands. But pol'cats don't mind mixin, somehow -- an 'fore long, how many leetle ones d'ye think they be?

Tongue still clobbered to yore jaws?

Ye kin nod yore haid for th' guess. One nod means oncet -- two nods means twicet -- and go on like thet.

Rosie! Git yore tail back from his nose so's he kin see.

Naow, go on -- make yore guess -- One? -- Two? -- Three? -- That's all? Just three? Wal', naow -- you lowlanders mus' be plain ignoranter of 'portant woodsy things or yo're not co'peratin. Try 'nother guess. One? Two? Three? Four? That's hit? Four?

Yore eyes an cheeks air a'goin to bug out e'en more, when ye hears th' true count. Ten! Yessiree! Ten leetle 'uns air what was had. Naow don't that take off like a scalded dawg?

Looky there! Th' sun's a'startin to go daown 'tween Hangin Man Peak an Cutter's Knob. soon Rosie an 'Tunia air goin in search of vittles -- worms, insects, rats, an mice, tho' they eats some yard eggs naow an' then, don't let nobody tell you they ain't helpful, tho, 'specially to us McGregor first-borned.

Pol'cats air smart. You wudn't think that Rosie could hold 'er tail so purt an high just a'waitin fer 'Tunia to take her spot? See how 'Tunia jumps up? Naow they air a'touchin noses. Naow 'Tunia's tail air a'liftn an she's a shiftin into position. See how Rosie be a'pullin her tail down? See how hit sorta pulls t'gether like Granny's fan?

Pull hit off'n his nose, 'Tunia!

Wal! Did you e'er set yore sights on sech'n thet? Not in a spell of lowlander years. Nawsir! Not in a hole passel full of lowlander years! They air smart. Real Smart. Heh! Heh!

Course, thet goes with th' tale what you come to hear a'fore ya gits back to yore stinkin swamps an low-valley musks.

Rosie! Fetch th' 'baccy. That's right! Next to th' big rock.

Hmmm! Thet's better tasting than Granny's last cobble fer the' pipe. Pol'cats likes the' smell, too. See how Rosie an 'Tunia air both a'peerin this way? Rosie don't like th' fire none, but she knows smoke sorta peac'fies things this time of evenin. Real peac'able like, hain't hit? Real peac'able!

Wal' stranger, you have seed thet McGregors took o'er th' hills above these low-valleys, hearbouts, some twenty first-birthins back. That's th' way McGregors tell time -- by first birthins, countin the first ones born to each family. They's no need for t'other ways. 'Sides, if'n th' good Lawrd had wanted t'other ways, he'd a'made hit thetaway!

Twarn't 'til nine first-birthins ago that all first-birthins died. That Samu'l McGregor -- he's th' one what shot down them flatlanders o'er agin su'cide cliff -- he be th' first, first-birther to live. Granny tells hit better'n, but ya have't hear hit from me fer ye gets loosened. If'n ye don't, they'll be 'nother lowlander an 'nother an 'nother a'pesterin 'round Pol'cat Hill 'til someone gits th' tale t' take back.

Granny, she hain't a first-birther, so's she kin live on Divil's Horn. That's where McGregors first settl'd when th' country was barren of low-landers. Seems like there was loads of strivin in McGregors to ring these hills and peaks so fast with kin-folk, 'specially when a'considerin thet th' first-borned allus died 'til Samu'l comed along, rescued up by Granny's vision-help.

Heh! Heh! Thet Granny air gen'uine McGregor, tho' she twarn't th' firstest McGregor to cum with vision.

Yore eyes be a'buggin agin, stranger. You heered of th' vision-help what Granny has? Scairt ye? Wal', Granny's Granny skeered th' firstest lowlanders to come hyear, too, an don't think they twarn't! Course Granny tells th' tale better'n, but then e'en Granny cain't hardly live on Pol'cat Hill none, tho' she do better'n lowlanders. Heh! Heh! Heh! An lowlanders hain't no more a'wantin t' visit other McGregor holdins than a biled owl, air they? Skeered they'd git deader'n four o'clock, hain't they?



® Lowlanders be curiouser 'bout Pol'cat Hill than starvin varmits in cold times. Heh! Heh! "Why does some McGregor's live with th' pol'cats?" they axes.

When th' night smoke rises from a warm pipe bowl ye'll get th' tale, stranger. Heh! Heh! Worked fer hit, hain't ye?

There . . . Naow where was hit tolded to? Oh, yes! Granny got hit from her Granny. First-Granny, what come o'er in sixteen hun' red an twenty by lowlander count, touched with th' silents for some spell. That be Caliban O'Leary, what First-Granny called them. First-Granny shipped from th' Englisher Island with Pickenses, Hayses, Dickenses an other furriners of thet kind. They was onliest one O'Leary 'board, an that be Caliban O'Leary. Th' ship stopped at th' rock what was named Plymouth, where hit had ended hit's furrow, so's all what come 'board could stop for honest livin so's other nosey furriners wouldn't bother no one.

First-Granny warn't too well liked by either of them furriners, e'en them what she rode with, 'cause she hed th' vision-help which could tell ye what was a'comin. She warn'd th' haid preacher what was settlin fo'ks down. "They's a'comin!" she cried. "Furriners be a'comin! Chillun an women folk be takin! Men folkses be killed! Cabins be burned!"

First-Granny tol' thet preacher feller 'bout what she knowed was true 'bout them Injuns a'comin. She hollared at that preacher feller louder'n a pack of dawgs a'closin in on a dang'rous panther.

Wal, we McGregors knows some of th' preachinest, but naiver none like thet one which First-Granny gived her vision-help too. D'ye know what he done?

'Tunia, move from th' lowlander's mouth so's he kin talk. . . . thet's better.

Naow, what d'ye s'pose thet preacher feller done?

Wal . . . if'n ye can't guess, hit'll be given to'ye. Thet preacher feller -- an we holds he t'weren't no real preacher feller . . . he went from door t' door actin' peculiar an quair, jest a'hollerin an a'carryin on as tho' hit were a McGregor four-day. Heh! Heh! That's a new bornin, new hitchin, new buryin' and a new hawg-killin in onliest one day!

Them furriners -- Pickenses and Dickenses an sech -- they took all First-Granny's clothes off, tied her to a post a'hanging o'er a water pond an dunked her 'neath th' water til they thought she wair daid!

Hey! Looky o'er there by Hanging Man Peak an Gutter's Knob! They say's a kinder woodsy spell lays o'er th' woods this time of dusk. Red sun orb'd betwixt dusky peaks sits like a kind o' touch o' th' divil on some, they says. But looky o'er there to Rosie. See 'er arch 'er back whilest a'wavin 'er purty tail up an daown? Looky how her graceful haid sorta arches o'er 'er purt an short face! Ain't thet a sight? Ain't thet a purty sight? Thet ain't no divil's tech!

Wal -- First-Granny was throwed outside th' stockade like you wud'a throwed chicken innards t' th' dogs. Course them furriners didn't know th' McGregors has ways of survivin. First-Granny woke up lively 'nough to crawl an hide in some bushes. She recolected some herbs an personables which was able to help in whompin up th' vision-help an whot give 'er strength, too. Her vision-help showed jest how an where to crawl, an when, so's she could stay live during th' next years which followed.

First-Granny worked her way to this hyear McGregor land, whar, a'ter 'bout one hundred years by lowlander count, she met up with Dooly McGregor, though of different mind than hern, havin no vision-help a'tall. Jes like First-Granny, tho', he'd worked his way 'cross hostile Injun an lowlander country, larnin how t' outwit both, an keep his flesh t'gether.

They joined themselves t'gether, an from them two come th' McGregors which air all 'round us'n, on the peaks an th' hills hyarabout. They's lots o' McGregors on those peaks. Lots o' 'em. Wudn't pay none a'tall to mosey about. Jest hyar on Pol'cat Hill, stranger. Jest hyar on Pol'cat Hill.

Anyways, First-Granny gived birth to Sean who died of no cause. Later, when Patricia grew to size, she gived birth to Patrick, who died of no cause. Then, one a'ter the' other, night onto one hun' red more lowlander years, every first-borned died of no cause. By then First-Granny had suspicion thet som'thin



was unnatural, and destruction, and then she lost the vision-help, so's twarn't 'till Granny -- thet's th' 'un what lives on Devil's Horn Peak -- took it up for all us McGregors.

Thet day lives amongst us McGregors better'n e'en a five-day -- a'hitchin, bornin, buryin, hawg killin, and somethin else daownright fascinatin like th' preacher fallin in th' mash barrel t' come out'n a'hollerin an a'wheasin and a'gaspin 'thought clothes, hair or holy book!

The fires gone from this hyear corn-cobby, jes wait'll I get it stoked good . . . There, naow. Before the bornin started -- a First-bornin -- Granny whopped up th' vision-help an stayed in hit near all day. When she comed out, her face was sorta peculiar. She didn't notice us a'tall. She jest sat there, a'stirrin th' hawg swill with a stick sorta playful like, as tho nothin a'tall matters. Ever onc't'n'while a'chasin a hawg or two which don't take kindly to messin with hits vittles.

Sudden like, she whomps out with "Michael!" -- thet's the Gran'pap, so's ye'll know who's who -- "Git me a pol'cat, complete!"

Yure eyes be a'buggin agin stranger. Ye air thinkin jes what Gran'pap thought, hain't ye? What has gittin a pol'cat, complete, to do with first bornin? Normal folkses wud'a hollered "Git water fer th' bornin!," or some sech, like "Git a shovel fer buryin th' cawlin!" Or "Find personables fer the' teas." Thet's whut normal folkses wud'a hollered. Nawsir! First-Granny jes hollered out, "Git me a pol'cat complete!"

Gran'pap didn't move quite fast 'nough. What Granny hollered then wud make yer cheeks puff, an yore face red like rhubarb pie. Gran'pap still didn't move fast 'nough. So Granny let go with a big glob of swill, and then Gran'pap, he moved!

McGregor's don't talk none 'bout what Gran'pap had to do to git a fulled up pol'cat, complete, durin' the next hour, as thet wud prob'bly make yore eyes split e'en worsen a young gal a'gitten bussed at 'er first courtin!

Anyways, th' first-bornin comed. Soon's th' little critter come, Samu'l -- the name which he was givin after t'was o'er an done, so's ye know who hit ended up to be -- wal, Granny lofted th' first-borned crittur up by th' heels with one hand an nigh covered that leetle tyke with pol'cat juice from head to toe, just as hit gasped for first breath. They say hit was pow'rful close in thet thar birthin room -- an in th' kitchen, too, they says.

Thet hain't the point, tho'. Thet pink leetle critter was th' very firstest first-borned McGregor t'live, an e'er since, all first-borned hed to git treated the same, and they all lived.

'Tunia an Rosie be a'gittin restless fer night vittles. They sees th' sun near gone below McGregor's Hill. Rosie most likely 'll git provoked into lettin go 'er fluids soon if'n she don't git relieved of guard duty. If'n it do happen, stranger, don't take hit personal. Hit's jest the' way with pol'cats when theys frustrated.

Anyways, they's jest a leetle tellin left. Pol'cat Hill been the' home of McGregor first-borned e'er since. McGregor's take keer o' McGregor's -- and pol'cats.

When Granny spelled her vision-help, they was so much space and time to visit, so far fer thoughts to reach, she nigh near didn't make it back. In eighteen and twenty eighty they warn't no lowlander larnin' that could tell us McGregor's what do to, and they was a powerful lot fer Granny t' git straight.

Even now when Granny has taken too much of the jug at a four-day she begins spoutin' words thet don't make no sense thet she took from her vision-help, words like "de'oxeeribnucl'uses, adentr'phosphat'ses, gene helixes, Myst'lida' Mephitis anal fluids, missin' genes, butyl mercaptan," . . . an th' like. Naow most lowlanders wud say they was some kind of magic words, or other superstitons like thet, but we McGregor's don't hold t' sech, nohow. Thet's a reason we stays away from ignorant lowlanders.

Naow ye see why first-borned stays on Pol'cat Hill? Why we be quair fer pol'cats? Naow ye sees why we learned to love th' pol'cat, and his perfumes? If'n we don't, we first-borns, we dies! D'ye understand?

Think yer curiosity bump be settl'ed naow? Ready t' leave?

Heh! Heh! Yore eyes air bugged further. I'll jest cut through yore piggin cords. 'Tunia! Rosie! Stand guard! Thet's right, we'uns a'goin let him run for hit. Ye kin take yer tail from his nose now, 'Tunia.