

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Frank of Freedom Hill

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Frank of Freedom Hill

Author: Samuel A. Derieux

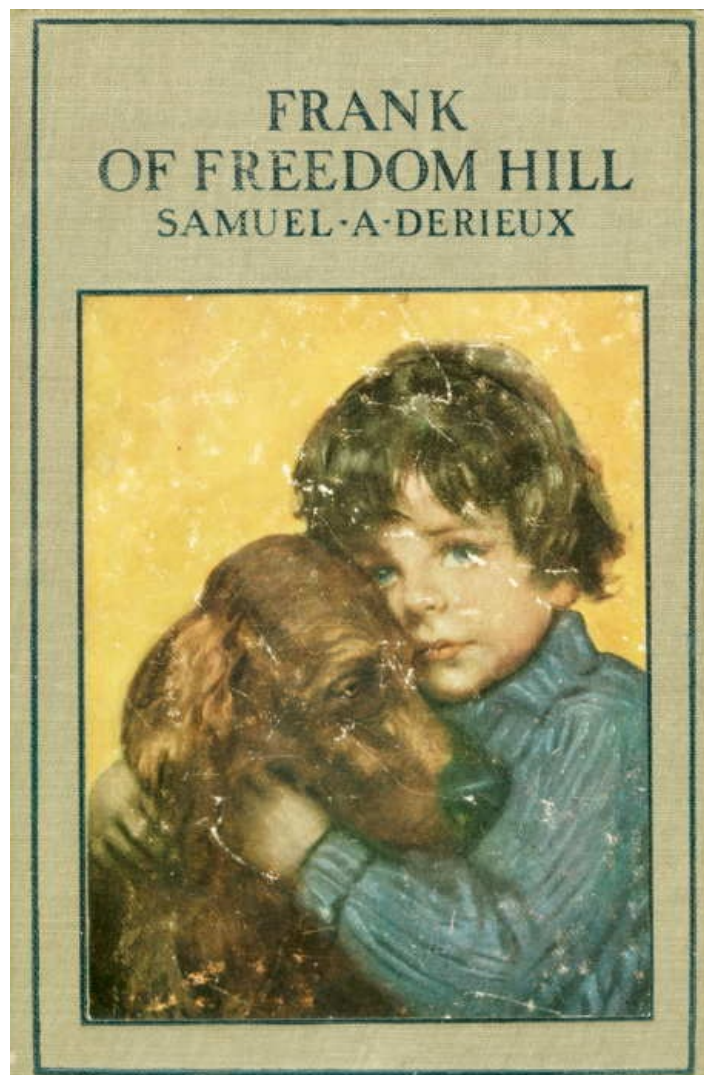
Release date: July 7, 2008 [eBook #25991]
Most recently updated: January 3, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Suzanne Shell, Martin Pettit, and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRANK OF FREEDOM HILL ***

FRANK OF FREEDOM HILL



F R A N K
OF FREEDOM HILL

BY
SAMUEL A. DERIEUX



WITH A FRONTISPIECE
IN COLOUR

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1922



Old Frank and Tommy

COPYRIGHT, 1922, BY
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, INCLUDING THAT OF TRANSLATION
INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGES, INCLUDING THE SCANDINAVIAN
COPYRIGHT, 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921, BY THE CROWELL COMPANY
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

TO
DR. BLANCHE COLTON WILLIAMS
WHO BELIEVED I COULD WRITE

CONTENTS

- [I.](#) THE DESTINY OF DAN VI
 - [II.](#) PARADISE REGAINED
 - [III.](#) THE BOLTER
 - [IV.](#) OLD FRANK SEES IT THROUGH
 - [V.](#) AN ACT OF GOD
 - [VI.](#) COMET
 - [VII.](#) THE CRISIS IN 25
 - [VIII.](#) THE TRIAL IN TOM BELCHER'S STORE
 - [IX.](#) THE PURSUIT
 - [X.](#) THE LITTLE BOY IN THE BLACKBERRY PATCH
 - [XI.](#) BLOOD MONEY
 - [XII.](#) THE CALL OF HOME
-

[Pg 1]

FRANK OF FREEDOM HILL

I

THE DESTINY OF DAN VI

The baggageman slid open the side door of the car. With a rattle of his chain Dan sprang to his feet. A big red Irish setter was Dan, of his breed sixth, and most superb, his colour wavy-bronze, his head erect and noble, his eyes eloquent with that upward-looking appeal of hunting dog to hunting man.

Cold, pine-laden air deluged the heated car and chilled his quivering nose and swelled his heaving chest. Beyond the baggageman he saw through the open door, as on a moving-picture screen, sunlit fields and sunlit woods whirling past. He began to bark at them eagerly, his eyes hungry, his tail beating against the taut chain an excited tattoo. The baggageman turned with a grin.

"Birds?" he said.

At the word the dog reared straight up like a maddened horse. Full-throated angry barks, interspersed with sharp, querulous yaps, filled his roaring, swaying prison. How long since he had got so much as a whiff of untainted air, or a glimpse of wild fields and woods! Out there oceans of such air filled all the space between the gliding earth and the sky. Out there miles on miles of freedom were rushing forever out of his life. He began to rage, to froth at the mouth. The baggageman closed the door.

[Pg 2]

"Hard, old scout!" The baggageman shook his head.

Resignedly the dog sank on his belly, his long body throbbing, his nose between his paws. A deep sigh puffed a little cloud of dust from the slatted floor.

Three years before he had opened his amazed puppy eyes on this man (and woman) ruled planet. An agreeable place of abode he had found it as long as he was owned by a man. The Jersey kennels of George Devant had bred him; Devant had himself overlooked his first season's training, had hunted him a few times. At Devant's untimely death, Mrs. Devant had sold the place, the kennels, the mounts. But when, followed by a group of purchasing sportsmen, the widow came to the kennel where he waited at the end of his chain, she had clasped her hands together and cried out:

"I won't sell this one!"

Lancaster, bachelor friend of the late Devant, spoke up:

"Why, I had *my* eyes on him."

"You won't get him," she laughed. "He'll live with me—won't you, beauty?"

[Pg 3]

"He's not a lap dog," Lancaster had reminded her.

"Don't you suppose *I* understand him?" she demanded.

Understand him? What did the woman know of a bird dog's soul? The most intolerable of burdens is kindness where no understanding is. To Mrs. Devant it never occurred, even remotely, that her Riverside Drive apartment was a prison. She never dreamed why it was that on their afternoon walks the dog, straining at his leash, kept his hungry eyes fastened always on the cliffs across the Hudson. When they returned, as she pulled off her wraps, she would look down at him.

"I know," she would say; "you are trying to tell me you love me!"

Courteously he would wag his tail. Futilely, out of upraised, gently brave eyes he would plead for freedom—from a woman who did not know, and could not understand.

Then Lancaster, a frequent caller at the apartment of Mrs. Devant, had borrowed him. That morning Lancaster himself had put him aboard this train. "The trip," Lancaster had said, "will be easier if we don't crate him." All day he had known he was being hurled away. Was another grimy wilderness of brick his destination? Had the baggageman closed the door forever on all he loved in the world?

The train slowed up, stopped. The baggageman opened the door and dropped to the ground. They were in the country and the sun had set. Through the door the dog looked across a dusky field to a black horizon of forest. Above this forest flamed a scarlet glow. Something far in its depths called him, and he plunged against the chain.

[Pg 4]

He was jerked back, choking, the glow out yonder reflected in his desperate eyes. He backed against the wall, took a running start, and plunged again. The breaking of his collar hurled him against a trunk on the other side of the car, dazed and confused.

A sharp approaching whistle, an ever-loudening roar in that brooding silence out there aroused him to a sense of his surroundings. A telegraph pole that had stood black athwart the glow began to move backward. The silhouette of the baggageman rose in the doorway. The dog gathered himself together and leaped. He landed on shining rails, in front of a blinding headlight; the pilot just missed him as he sprang out of the way. A northbound passenger train roared past. From the other train two sharp whistles, the screeching of brakes, and a shout. For a moment he stood on the slight embankment, his ears thrown defiantly back. Then he turned, and with great lung-filling leaps bounded toward the glow in the west.

It was dark in the woods when he stopped and lapped loud and long of icy running water. An alarmed owl went flopping heavily away under the low-growing branches. Underneath this embodied spirit of night galloped the dog, filling the woods with barks, leaping high into the air, his teeth snapping and clicking like castanets. In the edge of a straw field looked down upon by stars he rushed a covey on the roost. One struck against a tree and came chirping down. Dan leaped upon him. His hunger satisfied, he tramped a pile of leaves into a bed, and slept.

[Pg 5]

At sunrise he chased an early rabbit into an impenetrable, frost-incrusted brier patch. He rushed another covey, that flew away like the wind. He sat down on his haunches and with ears erect watched the distant, whirling specks scatter into the woods. He was helpless in the daylight without man and gun. He remembered a white-tiled butcher shop on upper Broadway, and licked his chops at the recollection.

At midday, a hungry tramp, he approached a farmhouse. A big shepherd dog met him. When the fierce mix-up was over, and the shepherd had retreated, Dan carried in his shoulder a long, deep cut. Impelled by the gnawing in his stomach, he limped toward a log cabin. A troop of black children ran screaming at sight of him, and a black man burst out of the cabin door with a gun. As he turned and bounded away, a shot stung his rump, and others hummed around him. He made for the woods, a pack of yelping curs on his trail.

[Pg 6]

From this time he avoided the habitations and highways of man, keeping to the woods and streams, turning reluctantly aside at the smell of a human being. Now and then he picked up a stray chicken; twice he fought inquisitive hounds; always his nose pointed like a compass toward the place where the sun set. He no longer resembled the dog that had graced the canine parade on Riverside Drive. He was gaunt, torn, caked with mud. His proud tail followed the curve of his haunches; he carried his head low to the ground; in his eyes gleamed hunger and outlawry. Freedom had exacted its price.

Near the close of the third day there was borne on the slight wind the smell of a man. Toward it he cautiously slunk, in his heart a desperate, gnawing loneliness. A masterless dog is like a godless man: there is no motivation sufficient for his struggles and achievements. If the dog had been full of meat, if a mate had trotted beside him, still he would have hungered for the countenance and voice of a master.

Suddenly he sank to the ground and looked keenly ahead. A young human three feet high, bare and frowsy of head, stood alone in the woods. His body was shaken by dry sobs, as if the tear supply had long since been exhausted. Now and then he looked fearfully around at the darkening shadows. Plainly, he was lost; plainly, he needed protection. Therefore the big dog advanced with ingratiating tail.

[Pg 7]

The man-child shrieked, turned, and ran, his terrified red face turned over his shoulder. He tripped, fell headlong, scrambled to his feet, picked up a stick, and faced about like a little cave man. The dog still advanced wagging his tail, throwing his ears far back, crawling contritely on

his belly, begging in every way he could beg to be allowed to serve this offspring of a man.

The pantomime won. The boy dropped his stick. The dog went to him and gazed longingly into the tear-reddened eyes. Humbly he licked the chubby hands, then the tear-soaked face. The boy smiled with a dawn of trust, put his hand testingly on the shaggy head, then round his neck. The dog sank to his haunches, his tail stirring the leaves. The boy gave a convulsive hug. Dan VI knew that his wanderings were over.

Far the child must have wandered from home, and suffered much, for, terror removed, he curled up in the leaves and fell asleep, the dog's warm body curled up beside. Suddenly Dan sprang up. From the sunset came the ringing of a bell. Perhaps this bell called this lost boy. Dan sat on his haunches, elevated his nose like an aircraft gun, and began to bay.

For an hour he answered the bell. Then there came through the woods the crash of running footsteps, and a young man burst into view, his clean-shaven face drawn and anxious. He stooped, picked the boy up, felt his arms and legs, laughed out loud. He lifted the boy to a broad shoulder and started for the bell.

[Pg 8]

"Come along," he said to the dog.

The bell was still ringing when they came in sight of a big house set on a high hill, with oak trees in the yard and barns behind. The man shouted; the bell ceased; a slender young woman came running toward them, followed by a fat old black woman who waddled as she ran. The young woman snatched the boy from the man's shoulder, and Dan knew from the crooning noises she made that she was his mother. Not until they were within a spacious fire-ruddied room did she notice the dog. She set the boy wonderingly down.

"Where did he come from?" she gasped.

The man laughed. "From Mars, I guess. He guided me to Tommy."

"Oh—you beauty! You wonder!" She stooped suddenly and caught the big head between her hands. Her eyes were bright and soft. "You noble, noble dog!"

Dan drew back. Why all this feminine fuss? Self-consciously he dropped his tail, imploringly he looked up at the man. The man understood. He poked the dog with his foot, and Dan started back with a mock snarl. Embarrassment vanished, equilibrium was established, they were placed at once on that footing of good-fellowship so necessary in the highest relations of man and man and man and dog.

[Pg 9]

"Sob stuff," laughed the man, "rattles him."

"Do you think we can keep him, Steve?" the woman pleaded.

"Of course."

"But suppose his owners come after him!"

"I tell you, Marian, he dropped from Mars. I know every bird dog fifty miles around. There's no such breed in *this* country. One minute."

He crossed the floor to a closet. When he turned he held in his hand a gun.

At the sight the dog leaped up into the man's laughing face. He ran round and round the room, his eyes brilliant, his nose quivering. The man put the gun away.

"To-morrow," he said significantly.

They named him Frank. In a week his old life was a memory, a disturbed memory, though, such as sometimes lingers after a grotesque dream. He had awakened, as it were, into a new world, a new and glorious life. From the porch of the old homestead—it sat on a hill that commanded an extensive view—he saw in maplike demarcations fields and woods and bottoms, like those that had rushed past in the dream, lying still and silent beneath him in sunlit reality.

His bondage was over. He came and went at will. He had his place by the fire when the night was cold. The strained, restless look left his eyes, and there was peace in his heart. Earle saw and understood.

[Pg 10]

"You haven't always been this way, have you, old man?" he asked. "I guess this is Freedom Hill for you, all right."

Frank did not know—being only a dog—the story that lay back of the name: the story that Earle's great-grandfather on the morning the old columned house was completed had summoned the slaves to the porch and given each his freedom.

"There will be no bondage here," he had said.

Dog and master took long hunts through the fair country that stretched away in blue undulations to the mountains. They returned at dusk, Earle with bulging game pockets, gun stuck under his arm, the setter trotting at his heels. They learned to know each other intimately, to respect each other's ability.

"One in a million, that dog," was Earle's verdict.

A sense of power, of superabundant life, of fulfilment tingled in his nerves and bones during these hunts. What joy came with the knowledge that his nose was growing keener, his judgment more profound! What added joy that his master knew—his master, stern and unrelenting when he was careless, generous with praise when he did well.

He developed fine scorn for visiting huntsmen who missed frequent shots—old Squire Kirby and John Davis, neighbours; sportsmen from afar, drawn to Breton Junction by the field trials held every year. How his master towered above them! How well he knew the crack of his master's gun! How well he knew there was a bird to retrieve when it spoke. He welcomed competition with man and dog. His nose like his master's gun was peerless in the field.

[Pg 11]

But hunting did not fill his life—there were idle days when he sauntered about at will. There was his sunny spot near the big rock chimney on the southern side of the house. There was his box underneath the back porch, filled always with clean straw, into which he could crawl on bleak days and listen to the rain spouting from the gutters and to the wind mourning around the corners.

Every shrub in the yard, every ancient oak, the wide-halled barn, the cribs filled with corn, the woodshed boarded up on the west, the blacksmith shop where Earle repaired the tools, all took on the intimate kindness of home. He grew to be a privileged character with the very animals on the place. He took his privileges as his due, even treating with amused condescension the fat black woman in the kitchen, who fussed and spluttered like her frying pans when he entered, but who never drove him out.

No living creature, however, not even a well-used bird dog, knows perfect peace. With the close of the hunting season, Tommy Earle, whom he had found in the woods, took him boisterously in hand. It was a season when a hard-worked bird dog stretches himself out to the lazy warmth of the sun, and pads with flesh his uncomfortably lean, hard muscles.

[Pg 12]

The persecution began a little timidly, for even Tommy could not be insensible to the latent power of those muscles and fangs. But when no punishment followed, it increased until there was no rest in the yard for the dog. He had never been accustomed to children. It galled him to be straddled as if he were a hobby horse; it reflected on his dignity to be yanked about by the ears and turned round by the tail. He realized that viciousness played no part in the annoyances, the demand was simply that he metamorphose himself into a boon companion. This he steadfastly refused to do.

Many times—his nose was on a level with Tommy's frowsy head—he looked sternly, even menacingly, into those irresponsibly bright blue eyes, but with no effect whatever. There were other times when the red Irish flared up, and he sprang back, strongly tempted to snap and snap hard. But always he reflected that master and mistress set a high valuation on the little biped. And Frank would have been a gentleman if he hadn't been a dog.

Self-control embitters a small spirit—it ennobles a large one. His forbearance was not without its reward. He found himself, partly through the virtue of necessity, growing indulgent. On that lonely plantation what outlet did the child have for his playmania? The dog remembered that in a former kennel life a puppy had incessantly chewed his ears. Perhaps he had been that way himself—all young animals are. And what was this creature, in spite of the fact that he ran upright instead of on all fours, and wore small overalls made for him by his mother, what was he but an active young animal?

[Pg 13]

Then instinct told him that on occasion Tommy would be loyal to the death. This was evidenced by the fact that Tommy once savagely fought a visiting boy who threw a stone into his box. Again, when enticed by the wanderlust of spring, he was gone three days, it was Tommy who, like the prodigal's father, spied him from afar and came running down the lane to welcome him eagerly home.

"No wonder he ran off," said Earle. "You worry him to death!"

Tommy looked up, past the belt, along the soft shirt, to the face bent down upon him like a disapproving providence. When he turned his eyes on the dog, there was wonderment in them as if perhaps the truth were dawning. Certainly for days he followed the dog around, plainly apprehensive that he would run off again. And Frank, far more ready to forget grievances than to remember them, began to watch him in his incessant play, even to take part on occasion.

Spring passed, summer came, and Earle was a busy man on the farm. The dog either followed him to the field, or sauntered about the yard with lolling tongue. He grew stouter, his coat glossier, his muscles more stanch. He grew sedate, too, like a gentleman of broad estates. More and more his face bore that stamp of magnanimity that comes only to noble breeds.

[Pg 14]

So things might have gone to the end, and Earle declared he dropped in from Mars, and Marian contended that he was sent to find her boy, and Tommy cared not where he came from so he was there. So things might have gone if Frank had not followed the buggy to Breton Junction.

For two weeks previous he had been growing restless. Long, cold nights, frosty mornings, gaudy colours here and there in the woods, a haze as of burning brush in the air—all these pointed to one conclusion: another hunting season was rolling majestically around. On the very night previous Earle had oiled the gun, Marian had patched the old hunting coat, Tommy had smeared the hunting boots with grease, and Frank had been let in to the fire to witness the performance.

He had never been allowed to follow the buggy to Breton. "It corrupts the morals of a dog to loaf around a railroad station," Earle had always said. But this morning he stole secretly after the buggy, and trotted under the rear axle unobserved by Earle and Tommy. A mile down the road he thought it safe to show himself. He ran eagerly around the buggy, as if he had suddenly conceived the idea of going with them, had just overtaken them, and had no doubt whatever of his welcome.

[Pg 15]

"Go back!" ordered Earle.

He stopped, ears thrown back, with that banal expression on his face of a dog pretending not to understand. The histrionic excellence of the performance was not lost on Tommy, who laughed out loud.

"Let him go, Popper."

"All right—you rascal!"

Frank ran ahead, barking up into the blazed face of the sorrel. Five miles farther from the crest of a hill they looked down on the village of Breton Junction, with the squat, sunlit roof of the station in the middle—box cars grouped about, semaphore above, and long lines of telegraph poles that came from out the south and disappeared into the north—one of those small centres in a vast nerve system that controls the activities of a continent.

At sight of station and box cars, at the sound of a freight engine hissing lazily, Frank came back to the buggy and looked up inquiringly into the faces of man and boy. When at a store awning Earle tied the horse, he followed close at their heels, confidence suddenly gone out of him. Association and instinct stirred vague recollections of a former life. Whence came that hissing engine? Where led those long flashing rails that disappeared into the blue of distant hills?

In a littered room, heated by a pot-bellied stove, with an instrument on a table that rattled monotonously like a mechanical species of cricket, a man handed Earle a crate of shotgun shells. Then twinkling, he looked down at the wide-eyed boy and the big red dog who stuck close to the boy.

[Pg 16]

"Steve, which do you think most of? Dog or boy?"

Earle laughed. "Hard to tell, Bill. On the whole, Tommy takes precedence."

"Ever find out where the dog came from?"

"No; and that's not all, Bill—I don't want to. All right, young man, let's get back home."

Frank sprang out of the door and ran for the buggy. His fears had vanished with the turning of his back on this reminder of things past. But when Earle and Tommy did not follow, he came dejectedly back. Tommy wanted to wait and see the train; he had never seen but one, he pleaded—that was a "fate" train. Far down the track a fateful whistle blew. Above them, the semaphore dropped with a clang.

"Come, F'ank!" shouted Tommy, dancing with excitement.

On the platform the boy took firm hold of providence as represented by Steve Earle's big forefinger with one hand and clutched the dog's mane with the other, lest the "suction" all children fear draw him under the grinding wheels. He felt the solid earth under his feet tremble as the great hissing engine rolled between him and the sun, the rod rising and falling on the terrible wheels, the engineer high above in a window. Then the long black baggage car—and in the door a man in a cap, who looked at them with open mouth as if he knew suddenly who they were. As the train stopped, the baggageman jumped to the ground and came running back to Earle, all out of breath.

[Pg 17]

"That your dog?" he demanded.

"Sure, he's my dog!"

"Where'd you get him?"

The wrinkles in the corner of Earle's eye came close together.

"Is that any of your affair?"

But the baggageman smiled ingratiatingly, like a man who wanted to be friends.

"Tell you why I ask," he explained. "I lost that dog on my old run with the Coast Line. Owners sued the road. Road came back on me—said I had no business accepting him without a crate. Had to hunt a new job—"

"Oh, come off!" interrupted Earle. "The Coast Line's a hundred miles east."

"Can't help it. That's the dog. Watch him. Commere—Commere, Dan. See? Knows me. Ever see the beat of that? I'm sorry, mister—but—if you don't mind—what's your name and address?"

Earle had turned, and was looking at the dog under the truck. Then without a word he gave his name. The baggageman wrote it hastily in a notebook. The bell began to ring. The baggageman started away running.

[Pg 18]

"That's what I call white, Mr. Earle!" he called as he swung aboard, waving his hand back at them like a man unaccountably happy and relieved.

Earle looked down. Tommy noticed that his mouth was grim.

"Come, son," he said.

Tommy looked at the dog with fear and with mute apology. In his heart was hatred of that baggageman, and vain, vain regret that he had ever come to Breton Junction to see the train. All the way home the dog trotted under the axle of the buggy. In the days that followed a far less sagacious dog than he would have sensed the anxiety that disturbed the homestead on the hill to which his destiny had led him.

There was nothing particularly extraordinary about a buggy turning in from the main road and coming up the long hill toward the house. Frank, basking in the morning sun, kept his eyes on it merely out of curiosity. But as it drew closer he rose slowly to his feet, his ears erect. Unreasoning antipathy to the couple in it raised his hair in a long tuft down his back. He withdrew toward the barn, his head over his shoulder, the sun glistening on his coat of silk.

"There he is!" cried Lancaster.

[Pg 19]

"Dan—Dan!" shrilled the woman.

The man jumped out of the buggy, lifted her to the ground, and both hurried toward him, smiling like old friends eager to be recognized. The woman extended her hand.

"Dan!" she coaxed.

He drew away toward the barn, his tail wagging sheepishly, mollified by their friendliness, wishing he could extend to them the welcome of the hill—but afraid of them and of what they represented. Steve Earle hurried out of the house, followed by Marian and Tommy, who held his mother's hand. They all shook hands—all but Tommy, who withdrew from the group with a frightened glance at the dog. Then Earle and Lancaster came toward him, Lancaster talking.

"We received notice from the railroad," he was saying, "and as Mrs. Lancaster and I were on our way to Florida, we thought we would stop over and make sure. The railroad has never met our claim." He laughed. "You know how a railroad is."

"Is that the dog?" demanded Earle.

"Oh, yes—undoubtedly."

Earle stopped. "Come, Frank," he ordered.

Frank hesitated, still wagging his tail. Smiling, Lancaster took a step toward him. A wolfish gleam came into the dog's eyes. He threw his head up like a wild horse. Lancaster took another step forward. He turned and bounded across the field, down the hill to the woods.

[Pg 20]

All day long he remained in the woods, gold with autumn, brilliant with many coloured leaves that sifted slowly to the ground and flashed for a moment transparent as they crossed the shafts of sunlight. The bell at the house tolled. The gun shot again and again. But not until late at night did he venture cautiously back, stopping in shadows like a big red fox come to rob the chicken roost.

He trailed the buggy off to the main road and toward Breton Junction. He returned to find his supper waiting on the back steps. Profoundly grateful, he crawled into his box. But at daybreak Earle came out, fastened a collar round his neck, led him by a chain to the corner of the front porch, and there fastened him. The cook brought him his breakfast.

It was his last meal there, she declared bluntly. That rich man and his wife were going to take him. They had spent the night at Breton Junction. They would be back directly. He had too much sense for a dog, anyhow. He made her feel spooky. She laughed. She was a big, bluff black woman. To her a dog was a dog.

Frank ran his nose over the food, but his stomach revolted. He shivered with cold and fear. Down the hill he watched the morning mists lift from the maplike demarcation of field and wood, revealing the rich pageantry of an autumn morning. He knew every spot that birds frequented in all that gorgeous country.

[Pg 21]

In the living room above him he could hear Earle poking the fire. He could hear the low mumble of his voice, the soft treble of Marian's. They avoided him now as if he were a plague. He did not try to make it out. His master was providence. He could not question the decrees of providence, but he would circumvent them if he could. Once he had broken a collar. He began to plunge, but was jerked back, coughing and choking. He lay down, and with his paws tried to pull the collar over his head. Worn out at last, he crawled underneath the house.

Then came a guarded tap-rap down the front steps. From under the porch he saw blue overalls and stubby shoes. They hugged the porch, they made their way toward him. Then Tommy squatted down and peered with solemn face into the shadow.

"F'ank," he whispered fearfully.

The dog went to him and licked the chubby hands and the soft cheek, as he had licked them that

first day. With a secret look all about, Tommy began to work with the fastening of the chain, his tongue poking through his lips and wiggling. The spring was strong, the thumb that pressed feeble, numb with cold. Once it clicked, and Tommy bit down on his tongue, and the dog sprang forward. The fastening caught, the boy gasped—then frantically began to press.

[Pg 22]

"What're you doing there?"

He dropped the chain; both conspirators looked up with a jerk. Earle's face was poked over the banisters above them.

"Nuffin!" The lie was shiveringly spoken.

"Come in the house, sir."

The mother came out and caught the boy by the hand. Her face was distressed. She cast a pitying look at the dog; then she pulled his would-be rescuer away.

"Ain't he our dog?" pleaded Tommy.

"No, dearest, he belongs to Mrs. Lancaster."

"Well, I can take him a jink of water, can't I?"

"He doesn't want any water."

The dog heard the little shoes hit each step twice. Of all the depressing signs of that depressing morning, the last protesting wail as the front door smothered it was the most ominous. Defeated, humbled, the dog slunk back underneath the porch.

But at sight of the hated buggy, he plunged and charged, frothing like a mad dog, running backward, trying to jerk the collar over his head, rolling over and over in his frantic struggles. Not until people were grouped above him did he grow quiet. Then when his former mistress stooped down and petted him, he begged her with his eyes as he had begged her in that other life, and knew, as he had known then, that she did not understand.

[Pg 23]

"I wonder what's the matter with him?" she said.

"It's plain enough what's the matter," replied Lancaster.

"Would you sell him?" asked Earle eagerly.

She straightened up. "No, indeed; we would not think of that."

"Then," said Earle wearily, "suppose we go in to the fire. You have a couple of hours to wait."

But he and Lancaster lingered near the porch while the women went into the house.

"I've just learned," Lancaster was saying, "that this is the plantation where the field trials are run. Have you thought of entering Dan?"

"No," said Earle. "Frank's an old-fashioned shooting dog. The greatest one I ever saw. He doesn't seem to have had field trial training."

Lancaster laughed. "Between you and me, until he came out here, most of his training was designed to fit him for a lap dog."

They went into the house, still talking.

The dog heard chairs dragged across the living-room floor. He slunk again underneath the porch. Then he heard a scraping sound behind him, and turned quickly about with pricked ears. Under the house, from the direction of the kitchen, Tommy Earle was crawling toward him on hands and knees.

The boy lost no time. He sat up straddle-legged like a tailor, and pulled the dog's head on his knee. Frank's eyes were green with excitement, foam rose from his bruised throat, his tail beat a tattoo on the dried dust.

[Pg 24]

First the boy attempted to unfasten the collar, but the leather was stiff, the buckle rusty. Then he tried to press the spring in. Once, like a dumpy animal, he crawled away. But he came back with a brickbat and hammered like a blacksmith at the spring. Then he bent over, caught the fastening savagely in his teeth, and gritted down. A sobbing intake of breath announced failure.

Time, precious time, was passing. People somewhere in the house were growing restless. The dog felt his self-control slipping in a mad desire to plunge at the chain. He started to rise, but the boy caught him angrily by the ear and jerked his head back into place. Chairs were pushed back in the living room. Down the back steps came a rapid, clumsy, heavy tread. Then the loud, coarse voice of the cook.

"Tomme—Tomme! I wonder whar dat chile gone to!"

The front door opened with a burst of voices. Enemies of freedom were closing in from every side. Freedom and slavery hung in the crimson pressing thumb. The cook's voice burst raucously—she was peering with rolling eyes underneath the house.

"Lawsy, Mr. Steve! Dat chile turnin' dat dawg loose!"

The fastening clicked. The boy gasped, the dog sprang up. No chain jerked him back. He leaped past the cook, who held her wide skirts out as if to catch him in a net. He heard Earle call. He heard Lancaster laugh. The field flew under him, the woods drew near. Long after he had reached them he galloped on and on.

[Pg 25]

In the afternoon he returned to the edge of the woods. He saw Earle come down the back steps, peer into the box, and shake his head at Marian, who stood on the back porch. Then Earle walked round to the old south chimney in the sun and knocked out his pipe, straightened up, and called. A fine figure of a man—his call carried command in every tone! To resist the overwhelming impulse toward obedience, the dog sank to the ground, his tail shaking the leaves, his eyes bright with worship of yonder man—and with a glint of humour in them, too. Did they think he would twice walk into the same trap!

But as the shadows climbed the hill toward the house his gaunt stomach, no less than his heart, longed to cross that intervening field. The west windows flamed with the sunset, as if the whole interior were a mass of silent fire. Smoke rose from the kitchen chimney, and on the cold air came the whiff of frying bacon. The cook waddled down the back steps, a tin bucket flashing under her arm, and the chickens flocked round her like fringes to her skirt. But still the dog remained in the woods, with the hunger in his stomach and the longing in his heart.

[Pg 26]

Then, when the cook had gone back, chickens vanished, the glow grown dim in the windows, and life seemed to have ceased in the yard, a little figure darted across it, disappeared in the lot, reappeared in the back door of the barn, and with a backward glance made for the woods where he lay. He had run away, plainly, for he had on neither overcoat nor hat. He was frightened, for he stopped a hundred feet away from the woods and his voice quavered.

"F'ank?"

He listened painfully, his mouth open, his chest heaving. When next he called there were tears in his voice. Finally, he looked all up and down the border of the woods. A third time he called, shriller, more tremulously. Then slowly he turned his back and started toward the house. Something must have blinded him, for he stumbled and fell. He got to his feet and looked at the hands he must have cut on the sharp stones of the field. Again he faced about and looked up and down the woods, and again he turned away.

Something tragic in this last turning about, something final, as if he had left hope behind him buried in the woods, swelled the tender heart of the watching dog. He could stand it no longer. Lightly he leaped the fringe of bushes, silently he galloped after the disconsolate little figure. Not until his warm breath on the nape of the white neck caused Tommy to turn, did he realize the depth of woe through which Tommy had passed. The frightened gasp, the look of terrible reproach, the tear-soiled face, the tragic eyes, told the story. It was fully a minute before Tommy controlled his sobs and hugged him round the neck. Then, ashamed to have been seen in this hour of weakness, the boy began to pound the dog with his fists. Finally he cried out—and in the shrill exultation of his voice, Frank knew that his own troubles and Tommy's troubles had all passed away.

[Pg 27]

"They gone—they gone on the chain!" Then, with wistful wonderment, "Where you been, F'ank?"

There were lights in the living-room and kitchen windows when they started toward the house, the boy's hand tightly clutching the mane of the dog.

"Mr. Lancaster," Tommy was explaining in a breathless voice that caught, "he says—he says you b'long to us! He says he come down an' hunt wif me an' you an' Popper! He says he give—give me a dun!"

In his ecstasy he grabbed the dog round the neck.

"Ol' F'ank! Ol' F'ank! I love ol' F'ank!"

Then in a voice he was training for future fox hunts Tommy Earle yelled, and the woods and the house and the barn between them tossed back and forth the thin echoes.

II

[Pg 28]

PARADISE REGAINED

Little Tommy Earle stood on tiptoe in the rear of the capacious hall of his father's barn, and glanced excitedly along the nickel-plated barrel of his air rifle, which he had poked through a knot hole. Out there on the ground between the barn and the corn field he had sprinkled some crumbs of bread. When sparrows came to pick up those crumbs—well, thought Tommy, it would be hard on the sparrows.

Behind him in the straw that carpeted the barn lay old Frank, Irish setter, taking his ease. Except during hunting season, wherever you found the boy you found old Frank. Now and then, at some slight movement of the boy, he pricked his ears in the direction of this miniature stalker of game. The rest of the time he either dozed off, or, suddenly aroused, snapped at a fly with that fierce

look in his eyes with which dogs and fly-swatting women view these buzzing pests.

Cathedral-high above them towered the overflowing hay loft. Through the wide-open doors behind them the barn lot blazed in the afternoon sun. The somnolence of a farmyard mid-afternoon brooded over the scene. Only the boy, peering through the knothole, was tense and vibrant.

[Pg 29]

For him this was a serious occasion. He had owned the air gun two weeks now, and he hadn't killed a thing. True, he had hit an upstairs window pane, but he hadn't intended to do that. He had merely shot at a raucous jaybird in a tree, and the upstairs window pane, the innocent bystander, as it were, had fallen inward with a sharp tinkle of broken glass. The mishap had brought down on him the warning from his father that if it, or any similar exploit, were repeated, the air gun would be confiscated.

"But I didn't mean to, Papa!" he had cried.

"That doesn't make any difference, old man," Steve Earle had said; "the window is broken all the same."

The boy had walked away from the interview, sobered. Sprung from the loins of generations of hunters, the love of a gun was in his blood, and this air rifle was his first love. Since the warning he had used the horizon as a backstop for all his shots. Old Frank, who had followed him around at first, pricking his ears at every shot, ready to bring in the game, had concluded that there would be no game to bring in, and had lost interest at last.

Then, just an hour ago, the boy had hit upon this scheme of baiting sparrows to their doom. And now with the patience of the born hunter, tireless like the patience of the cat watching at the mouse hole, he waited for sparrows to come. His face was flushed, his eyes were shining, the smooth muscles of his bare, sturdy legs were knotted as he stood a-tiptoe, peering.

[Pg 30]

Now, Steve Earle, the father, was not only a mighty hunter, a bigger edition merely of the boy—he was also a modern, successful planter. His corn and tobacco and cotton crops were the talk of the county; his horses were pedigreed; his mules sleek; his chickens the finest. Among these latter was a prize-winning Indian Game super-rooster named Pete. He was big, boisterous, stubborn, and swollen with pride and vainglory.

It was Pete who now appeared through the aisles of the tall corn, within range of Tommy's periscopic vision, chortling and boasting to the sober harem that followed him. Suddenly he raised his head; his beady eyes glittered; he hurried greedily toward the crumbs, squawking hoarsely, clucking wildly, like a crude fellow who aspires to be a gallant and overdoes the part.

"Shoo!" cried Tommy through the porthole.

Pete raised his head high and cackled in amazed indignation that anybody should say such a thing to him. Then, dismissing this temporary annoyance of a small boy yelling at him through a knothole, he hurried into the very midst of the crumbs. He picked one up; he turned round to the hens; he dropped it to demonstrate what he had found. The hens cackled in admiration of the splendid performance.

[Pg 31]

At this Pete went crazy; his clucking increased prodigiously; he pawed crumbs into the ground, just to show how grandly careless he could be in the midst of such profusion. And here came all the hens to him, half flying like a covey of quail about to alight.

"Shoo!" yelled the boy a second time.

Again Pete cried out indignantly, as if he really didn't know what to make of such impertinence. Crimson of face, Tommy left his lookout. Frank following, he ran round the barn and burst into the midst of the feasters. A wild scattering ensued. Cackling and squawking, the valiant Pete led the retreat through the corn. Face still flushed, Tommy came back to his post and poked his gun through the knothole. And once more, after a very brief interval, here came Pete.

To analyze the motives that led to his return would require a knowledge of rooster psychology, if any such thing exists. Maybe Pete actually forgot what had just happened—his head was very small, his face very narrow, and he had a receding forehead. More likely, though, his enormous vanity lay at the bottom of it. He would show these wives of his, in whose admiration he basked all the day long, whether or not he was to be thwarted in his purpose of eating crumbs by a meddling boy with some kind of shiny instrument in his hand.

[Pg 32]

Yet once more, when Tommy burst upon him and into the midst of his admirers, he threw all semblance of dignity aside. He ran ingloriously away, jumping high into the air when clods of dirt like exploding bombs struck near him, and hitting the ground again on the run, with loud cackles of indignation and wild excitement.

"Sick him, F'ank!" screamed the boy. "Sick him!"

But old Frank sat down on his haunches panting, which is a dog's way of shaking his head. To injure his master's property, even at an order from his master's offspring, was something which he, as a dog of honour, could never think of doing. He did look with a touch of regretful longing at the fleeing rooster; he pricked his ears, his eyes grew fierce, he licked his chops. There had been a time, perhaps—but that was long ago, in the dim past of his irresponsible puppyhood.

"You ain't no 'count!" said the boy.

The long silken ears flattened; the brown eyes looked indulgently into the angry blue ones. He could stand such an accusation very well; his character was thoroughly established, his life an open book. Just now the boy was beside himself with anger, and a friend passes over things said in anger. Only a small spirit without magnanimity is touchy on such points.

[Pg 33]

Tail waving gently, therefore, he followed the outraged boy back to the barn. The crumbs were all gone. The nimble bills of the hens, the greedy, overbearing beak of the rooster, had gobbled them all up. Resentfully, Tommy picked up his shiny air rifle and went to the house after more.

In the spacious kitchen, hung with pots and pans, old Aunt Cindy, big, fat, black, her head tied up in a red bandanna handkerchief, sat churning butter and singing a hymn:

"Dere was ninety an' nine dat safely lay
In de shelter ob de fol',
But one had wandered fur away,
Fur from de streets ob gol'."

At sight of the boy's flushed face, and in the presence of his eager request, hymn and churning ceased together.

"What you gwine do wid mo' bread, honey?" she asked.

"I'm going to kill some birds," declared the boy with a burst of optimism, forgetting for the moment that Pete might have decreed otherwise.

The old woman rose chuckling from her churn and waddled across the floor to the cupboard, no bigger and broader than she.

"Whar you baitin' 'em, honey?" she asked next.

"Behind the barn!"

[Pg 34]

She sat down, bread in hand, pulled him to her, and patted his back. That was the price he had always to pay for bread or butter or jam. Finally, she gave him the bread and let him go. Down the back steps he came, running eagerly and calling Frank. Once more in the kitchen began the flop of the churn, once more rose the wail of the song.

"Away on de mountings he heered its cry,
Sick an' helpless an' ready to die——"

Twice more did Tommy drive the intolerable rooster away. The first time he chased him deep into the corn, almost to the pasture. The second time he tried to corral him and the hens and drive the whole bunch into the chicken yard, running here and there with eager face and outstretched hands.

He almost succeeded, for Frank helped him at this like a collie dog herding sheep. Right to the gate of the chicken yard Pete went, followed by the excited hens. Then he seemed to suspect some sort of trap or hidden mine in there, and, with loud ejaculations, broke away and ran streaming toward the corn, followed by the hens.

Grim of face, the boy took his stand once more at the knothole. Boastful as ever, after an interval, came Pete. Not only to-day, but to-morrow and the next day and through all the days to come, he would have to give up shooting sparrows because Pete liked bread crumbs.

[Pg 35]

"Shoo!" he said for the last time, rather quietly now.

"Caw, caw!" retorted Pete, throwing up his head.

The shiny sight of the air rifle glistened against the beady, vicious, triumphant eye, cocked a little sideways. "Ping!" spoke the air rifle. In a stall a frisky young mule wheeled around and kicked the bars continuously like a rapid-fire gun. Old Frank, who had lain soberly down, sprang to his feet with pricked ears and eager eyes. From without came a hoarse, faint squawk and heavy flopping of wings. Out of breath, Tommy turned round. "I hit him, F'ank!" he gasped.

Pete, big and heavy as a turkey gobbler, was flopping round and round when they reached him, beating the ground with lusty wings, sliding his limp head along the dirt, acting crazy generally, as if Aunt Cindy had wrung his neck.

"Aw, get up!" said Tommy.

But Pete did not get up, and, sobered, the boy glanced around. The hens had fled the violent scene; the hulk of the barn hid what was going on from the yard. Only Frank had seen, and Frank never told anything. Tommy leaned his rifle against the barn, straddled the heavy rooster and, face flushed, lifted him, limp and dangling, to his feet.

"Stand up, Pete," he coaxed. "You ain't dead!"

[Pg 36]

But when he released him Pete collapsed like an empty sack, kicked frantically a time or two, and was still. Then the boy saw the blood that trickled from his head. Straight into his eye and into his brain, if he had any, the BB shot had gone. Pete would never eat any more crumbs. Breathing

fast, the boy looked at Frank. Ears drooped, eyes worried, Frank looked at the boy. And while they looked, down the back steps came the solid tread of Aunt Cindy's broganned feet, and her regular afternoon summons broke the silence:

"Chick! Chick! Chick!"

Through the corn the silly hens went running toward the yard, their appetites nowise affected by the calamity. Again the old woman called. Then she spoke, and Tommy's heart jumped up into his mouth. His father had evidently sauntered round the house, as fathers have a way of sauntering, just at the wrong time.

"Mr. Steve—whar dat rooster?" asked the old woman.

Earle laughed. "I haven't got him, Aunt Cindy."

"It sho a funny thing," she declared. "He allis de fust to come when dey's anything to eat. Somethin' done happen to him. You stay here. I lay I kin fin' him!"

Tommy hastily picked up his rifle. The old woman was coming; he could hear her skirts dragging across the weeds at the side of the barn. A short distance in the opposite direction was the corn crib. To the side of it away from the barn he retreated, followed closely by Frank.

[Pg 37]

He heard her exclamation when her eyes fell on the dead rooster.

"Honey!" she called gently, "whar you, honey?"

He didn't answer; he didn't have to answer. She could stand there calling till night if she wanted to. Then he heard her grunt and sigh as she stooped down. When he peeped cautiously around the corner, she had picked up the rooster and started for the yard. They would all know now.

His heart grew bitter at the thought. He ought to have hid the rooster. He ought to have got a spade and buried him. He was full of regrets, not for what he had done, but for what he had not done. He would stay here till dark. He would stay here all night. He never would go home any more. He would hide in the woods, and he and Frank would hunt. He would kill what they wanted to eat and cook it over a fire. His face was set. His mind was full of grim little desperate outcast thoughts.

Then his dark romance was shattered. From the yard his father had called him. The call seemed to search out this very spot, but he did not answer. Let them find him if they wanted him. He wasn't going to them, and he wasn't going to run, either. They would try to take his gun away now. There was a lump in his throat as he thought of the injustice of it, of the insults he had patiently borne, of the futility of explanations where grown people, who loved and treasured roosters above everything else, were concerned.

[Pg 38]

He heard them coming through the lot and flattened himself against the wall, his eyes full of fight. They would have to throw him down and beat him into insensibility. To the end he would cling to his gun, asking no quarter, making no explanations. And thus they found him—Aunt Cindy first, then his father and his mother. He glanced sullenly at them and said nothing.

"Hiding, old man?" asked his father.

At something kind and comradely in the tones he looked up with sudden hope beyond the belt and the shirt into the clean-cut face and gray, twinkling eyes bent down upon him.

"No, sir," he said. "I wasn't hidin'."

"Well, who killed Pete?"

His heart began to pound in his ears; the eyes of his father held him; he had almost owned up; then it came over him, as all such things come, by inspiration. There stood old Frank, gently wagging his tail. Frank had nothing to lose; nothing would be done to Frank. Frank's reputation was spotless; it could stand a stain or two. Eagerly he smiled up into his father's face.

"F'ank killed him!" he said.

For a moment the air was electric with uncertainty. Then his mother spoke, her eyes full of pain and reproach.

[Pg 39]

"Why, dear!"

"Honey, honey!" remonstrated Aunt Cindy, "you know dat dawg——!"

But a quick glance from his father silenced this feminine outburst. "All right, old scout," said Earle gravely. "Just as you say. We'll go back to the house now; and we'll see to it that Frank doesn't kill any more chickens."

Tommy took a deep breath; he could hardly believe his ears. He had braced himself for fight, prepared himself to defend his assertion, and now there wasn't going to be any fight at all. At first he thought his father must have understood and become *particeps* in the secret with him and Frank and the gun. Then it dawned on his delighted mind—his father actually believed what he had said!

He went back to the yard with them, profoundly relieved, as if he were walking on air. He even

had for a moment a virtuous feeling as if Frank had really killed the rooster, and he had only spoken the truth. Then he began to feel proud in a secret sort of way. It had been quite a stroke. He had never experimented sufficiently with this method of getting out of trouble. It was really quite simple. He would try it again some time.

He had a vague idea that something had hurt his mother, and he was sorry for that. But she would get over it; he would be unusually loving to her. Really, all one had to do was to make a statement, and grown people would swallow it. They were easy marks.

[Pg 40]

Yet, somehow, though he had won out by superior intelligence, he wasn't as happy as he should have been. He felt some of the loneliness of genius. And when in the back yard his father turned and called Frank sternly to him, he began to fear that the affair might not be so simple after all.

With growing uneasiness he watched old Frank go to Earle, tail depressed, eyes troubled. Earle led him to the kennel at the side of the house and chained him up. Frank sat down on his haunches and looked up into his master's face.

"Now," said Earle, "I'm going to give you time to think about it. Then I'm going to wear you out!"

"Pete ate my crumbs, Papa!" cried the boy, the blood rushing to his face.

His father turned and spoke to him confidentially, as man to man. They would have to cure Frank, right now, before killing chickens got to be a habit. They couldn't afford to have a chicken-killing dog on the place—it was too expensive.

And that was just the beginning of his troubles and complications. Every afternoon since he could remember, he and his father and Frank had gone to the pasture to see about the cattle. But now old Frank was chained up. And when his father asked *him* to come along, he shook his head. He didn't want to be alone with his father. He had an idea that it would be terribly and silently embarrassing down there with no one around but the two of them.

[Pg 41]

"I don't want to go," he declared.

"Very well," said Earle, and went off alone, through the lot and into the corn.

And he got no comfort whatever out of the talk he had with his mother a little later in the living room, though she smiled at him when he entered, and put her sewing aside.

Encouraged, he went to her and leaned against her knee; she brushed his hair back off his forehead, just as she always did.

"What is it, dear?" she asked.

"Papa ain't goin' to whip F'ank, is he, Mama?"

"Why, yes—he has to."

"I tol' F'ank to kill him!"

"But Frank's a grown dog—he knew better."

He grew suddenly angry—angry at her very simplicity.

"F'ank won't kill any more chickens!"

"How do you know?"

"I know!" he cried, and stamped his foot. "I know!"

He came away from this futile interview in a suppressed rage. From the hall he saw old Aunt Cindy waddling about in the dining room. No use to appeal to her. She knew too much, anyhow, that old woman. There was in her nature none of the simple credulity that characterized his parents. She was worldly wise, like himself.

[Pg 42]

He avoided her, therefore, his face turned over his shoulder, afraid she would see and call him. He went out on the front porch, down the steps, and, gun under his arm, sauntered round the house to the kennel. Old Frank came to meet him as far as the chain would allow. Frank thought he was going to be turned loose now—his eyes showed it. There was a log of wood beside the kennel, and the boy sat down on it. Frank nestled close to him, tail dragging across the ground.

Suddenly the boy was all attention, and Frank had pricked his ears. Steve Earle had come from the pasture, gone up the back steps, and into the room with the boy's mother. Through the open window just above the kennel he could hear them talking in a confidential sort of way, as grown folks talk when they think no one is listening.

"Where's the boy?" asked Earle.

"I don't know, Steve—he went out just now."

She was silent a while, then she spoke, with a little laugh that didn't sound like a laugh:

"Steve—it's pitiful, pitiful!"

"It's drastic, Mother—but it's the best way."

"But, Steve—suppose it doesn't work?"

It was his father who was silent now.

[Pg 43]

"Then that will be pretty tough, Mother," he said at last.

They talked some more—meaningless grown folks' talk that didn't get anywhere. It didn't seem to bear even remotely on the essential question in hand, which was whether or not Frank was to be whipped. They weren't even interested enough in the matter to speak of it. They just talked—that was all. They didn't care anything about him and Frank, or what became of them. They thought more of roosters than of anything else. They were all against him and Frank and the gun. All right—he and Frank and the gun would look out for themselves!

Once more his mind filled with visions of a wild life, in which escape and vengeance were mingled in proper and satisfying proportions. In the woods beyond the pasture was a cave, which he and Frank could reach before dark. Then they would ring the farm bell and raise a great hullabaloo, but he and Frank, safe within the dark cavern, would live their own lives.

The more he thought of it, the more enticing it became, and his eyes filled with a caveman's fire. The entrance to the cave was pretty dark and "snaky"; maybe he would compromise and not go in. But the woods round about were thick, and there were plenty of hiding places.

He left Frank, and, heart pounding, went round the side of the house, looking up at the familiar windows high overhead. There came over him a scorn of the civilized existence these people led, and he wondered that he had endured it so long. He went quietly up the back steps, peeped into the kitchen, then entered softly.

[Pg 44]

Old Aunt Cindy was in the dining room, which was separated from the kitchen by a passageway. He could hear the rattle of dishes in there as she set the table for supper. Well, there would be one seat empty this night, and maybe through a good many nights to come. He got up on a chair in front of the cupboard and filled his pockets with biscuits.

All excited, he came out of the house, hurried to the kennel, and turned Frank loose. Frank had caught the contagion. Frank knew there was something *sub rosa* about what was going on, and his eyes were glowing. Likely they would shine like a cat's eyes in the dark cave at night—and maybe there would be other wild eyes shining in the recesses that led off here and there and dripped with water!

He hesitated a moment, trying to think of some other spot where they might run, some spot less suggestive of shining eyes. And while he hesitated there came steps on the front porch, and around the house, pipe in mouth, his father sauntered, as fathers have a way of sauntering, just at the wrong time.

"What're you doing there, Tommy?" he demanded.

[Pg 45]

The cave and the wild life vanished like a bubble that has burst.

"Pete ate my crumbs, Papa!" he cried.

For a moment his father hesitated, looking down into his eyes as if he were perplexed and worried and did not know what to do. Then once more he chained Frank up.

"You mustn't turn him loose again," he said sternly.

"I tol' him to kill Pete! I tol' him to!"

"And he did it?"

The eyes which the boy raised to the man's face were full of fight. He had said it, and he was going to stick to it. It was no longer only a matter of saving the gun; it was a question of principle now.

But his father did not press the question. With just a queer look into the boy's defiant eyes, he turned away and walked across the yard toward the garage, head bowed. Tommy watched him. No doubt his father thought he would follow. He had always liked to hang about the garage, he and Frank, and watch his father tinker with the car. It had been one of the high lights of their daily life. But now old Frank was chained up—and as for him, he didn't care anything about automobiles.

Frank had sat down on his haunches, in his fine old eyes, as he watched his master's retiring form, that disconsolate look of a dog whose feelings are deeply wounded. A moment Tommy regarded his offended friend. No use to think of turning him loose again with his father within hearing. Tommy hardened his heart. All right—so be it—he had done his part. Things would just have to take their course. Gun under arm, face set and grim, he walked round the house, and left old Frank to his fate.

[Pg 46]

There was a side porch around here, where his mother sometimes sat in the mornings, but which was deserted the rest of the day. On the step he took his seat, a solitary little figure, his gun between his knees. Here he would stay until the beating was over, here where he could not see it, and could not hear it—very plainly.

He was full to the brim of rebellious thoughts. He wished Pete were alive so he could shoot him

again. He thought of boys he knew whose parents let them alone, and he envied them their lot in life. Maybe he would go and live with some of them, go where he would be appreciated. He would take Frank with him, of course; that went without saying: life would be a void without Frank.

Yonder was the apple orchard, with the gold of the setting sun glancing through the tree trunks, and yonder in it was the brush pile where, on that memorable morning, he and Frank had "almost" caught a rabbit. Beyond were the woods where another afternoon never to be forgotten Frank had jumped a red fox bent on mischief, who, his father said, would have got some chickens that very night if Frank hadn't chased him far into the distant hills.

[Pg 47]

Then there was the time down in the creek bottoms when he had sat down on a log, and Frank had rushed toward him, leaped the log, and jerked the life out of a big copperhead moccasin coiled just behind him in the grass. And not very long ago, at the country store up the road, when a big boy had tried to bully him, Frank had come to his side and growled, and the boy had backed off, his face white. Frank had always stuck to him.

His face grew solemn, a lump rose in his throat. He could not sit here any longer with Frank chained up around yonder waiting a beating. He got up and started once more around the house. He was just in time to see his father cross the yard and stop in front of a bush.

He stood where he was, watching with alarmed eyes. When his father turned he had a switch in his hand. At sight of it the blood rushed to the boy's face, and every nerve tingled. He had doubted it a little bit up to this time; now there was no doubt left. His father was going to whip Frank.

Once at Tom Belcher's store he had seen a man whip a dog. The dog had writhed rather comically on the ground, and his cries had filled the air. He himself had stood on the store porch and watched the performance in a detached, judicial frame of mind. It had been a spectacle, and nothing more; but this was vastly different. That had been an old hound, and this was Frank.

[Pg 48]

That was a big switch his father had cut, and his father was very strong. It would hurt, hurt even through Frank's long hair, hurt terribly. Frank would writhe on the ground, Frank's cries would fill the air. He watched his father's face as Earle came toward him. It was serious and grim, so serious that it almost hurt. Maybe his father didn't want to whip Frank; maybe he was doing it because he thought, in his ignorance and simplicity, that he ought to; maybe his father hated to do it.

He thought of retreating once more to the side porch where he could not see, of hurrying beyond it to the orchard and there crying, perhaps. But he could not do that. Breathing fast, he followed his father, led by the fascination of horror. Anybody looking at him, unless it was his mother, would have thought he was going out of curiosity, to see the thing well done. But there was a humming sound in his ears; the lump was choking him cruelly; the whole yard was swimming round, and everything looked strange.

As they drew near the kennel, Frank rose quickly to his feet, his tail tapping the taut chain, his eyes eager and glowing as he looked from one friend to another. Frank thought they had come to turn him loose and give him his supper in his tin plate on the back steps. Then he saw, and his ears drooped—saw the look on their faces, saw the switch, and he sank down on his stomach and laid his big head humbly between his paws at his master's feet.

[Pg 49]

"Don't!" shrieked the boy. "Papa, Papa, don't!"

In the midst of the whirling yard and barns and things, his father had turned and looked down at him with strange burning eyes.

"I can't let him kill chickens, son."

It all happened in a flash. He hadn't intended doing any such thing. His last resolve, even as he came around the house, had been to stick to his spoken word. But now passionately he threw the air rifle away from him, and stood looking up at his father with dilated eyes and heaving, sturdy chest.

"Take the old gun!" he cried. "I don't want it! I killed Pete—F'ank never done it. I shot him through the head!"

His father had stooped down now, and he was in strong arms. His cheek was pressed against his father's cheek, and over a broad shoulder, through a haze of tears, he looked miserably into the red glow of the setting sun.

"I tol' F'ank to kill him," he sobbed brokenly, "an' he wouldn't. I drove—drove him off, an' he kept comin' back. I killed him—I shot him through the head!"

The arms tightened about him, the cheek pressed closer to his cheek.

[Pg 50]

"That's all right, old man," said his father. "I understand."

Gradually the sobs ceased, for he fought them down like a little man. And when at last Earle rose, Tommy looked up clear-eyed into his father's face, as he used to look before he ate of his forbidden fruit. Then his father went to the gun, picked it up, and came back to him.

"It's yours," he said gently.

For the second time that day Tommy could hardly believe his ears; his eyes were uncomprehending, for he had never expected to own the gun again.

"You've earned it," said Earle, with a smile.

Then, within the house, swung lustily by old Aunt Cindy's strong wrist, the supper bell rang. At the top of the kitchen steps the mother waited with happy face. And up these steps, the sinking sun shining upon them, went father and boy and dog together.

III

[Pg 51]

THE BOLTER

One January afternoon there got off the train at a straggling little Southern town a massive man past middle age, with a craggy face and deep-set eyes, and the looks and manner of one with power and wealth. His name was William Burton, manufacturer of the famous Burton ploughs, and he could have bought this town out, lock, stock, and barrel, and the county in which the town sat, and a very considerable portion of the state itself. What he had come to buy, though, was a dog.

During the trip down, in his stateroom, instead of examining financial reports or reading the latest magazines, old Burton had studied, with the aid of his spectacles and of Ferris, his professional dog handler, the pedigree of a young pointer that lived in this town. He had noted how at recurrent intervals in the family tree occurred the word Champion. Already, in the years since he entered, as a hobby, the field-trial game, he had bought, at the recommendation of handlers, some hundreds of bird dogs. All of them had been disappointments. Now he had taken the matter into his own hands. Usually when he took charge of a thing, that thing succeeded.

[Pg 52]

A lazy Negro at the dreary railroad station showed him and Ferris the way to Jim Arnold's place—a neat, modest cottage on the edge of the town from whose back yard, as they approached, came a challenging bark. A telegram had preceded them, and Jim Arnold himself, veteran bird-dog trainer, owner of the young pointer, came out to meet them, hobbling painfully on a stick.

Ferris could have explained the hobble and the stick. It's the kind of thing you see now and then among field-trial men. Earlier in the season, while running in a field trial the very dog who had brought the visitors here, his horse had fallen, crushing Arnold's knee. Jim Arnold could never ride a horse again. Consequently, Jim Arnold could never again run a dog in a National Championship race.

With the crippled man came his daughter Jessie, a slim, dark-eyed girl, pretty in a serious sort of way. Burton was hardly conscious of her, but Ferris respectfully raised his hat. Dog men knew Jessie Arnold because she sometimes rode with her father and helped him handle. She had been with him when his knee was crushed, and had held his head in her lap till the doctor came.

After the briefest of greetings the three men, followed by the girl, went around to the rear yard. Here, in a lot enclosed by a high wire fence, wagging his tail like any other dog, was the National Championship hope.

[Pg 53]

Great dogs, like great men, do not always look the part. This one did. He was a big white fellow, his ears and a portion of his head liver brown. His head was nobly carved, his back long and straight, his legs rangy, clean-cut, his tail thin, like a lance; he was all a pointer of the highest breeding ought to be. But to the man who knows dogs there was in his eyes something wild, headstrong, untamed, the kind of thing you see in the eyes of young aviators.

"Let him out, Jess," said Arnold.

The girl opened the gate and he sprang out. He ran eagerly around the yard, inspecting the familiar premises to see if there had been any other dog there recently. Every motion showed unbounded power, as if the yard, and even the town itself, were too small for him. Not until Arnold called him twice, and severely, did he come to them. But he had no attention to bestow upon his distinguished visitor. His eyes sought first his master's face, then the face of the girl. There they rested a moment in adoration. Then he reared gently up against her, ears thrown back, upraised eyes affectionately searching her face.

Old Burton had been looking on with impassive countenance. But from the moment his eyes rested on this dog he wanted him. His hunch told him that here was a champion, and he went by hunches. He looked at Ferris, quickly, significantly. Ferris nodded in a way which indicated that he would like to speak in private. Millionaire and handler withdrew a few steps from father and daughter and dog.

[Pg 54]

"I don't like that look in his eyes!" whispered Ferris vehemently.

"I do!" said old Burton.

In Arnold's little over-furnished parlour the business was transacted. But neither the young pointer out there, nor the girl who remained with him, were to know anything about it. So far as

the dog was concerned, man, his master and god, moves in mysterious ways. As for the girl, it was her father who requested that the trade be kept a secret from her.

"She sets a lot of store by Drake," he explained. "She picked him out from the litter when he was a pup. She's fed him and raised him. People are always comin' to see him. She thinks that's the reason you come—just to look at him."

Burton glanced at the crippled trainer with slightly hardened eyes. He resented this intrusion of the human element into a deal, particularly when that human element was a girl. It has a way of breaking things up. However, for a while, things went smoothly, though the conversation was carried on in lowered tones. Three thousand was the price agreed upon. It was a good price for Arnold to get if the dog did not win the championship. It was a poor price if he did.

[Pg 55]

For to own a national champion means a steady income from his puppies. It brings fame to the owner and to the trainer. He has trained one champion—maybe he can train another. Men send him their dogs; his price goes up, like that of the teacher who had turned out a prima donna. To own and train a national champion may put a man like Arnold on the map.

And now he was gambling with the chance. His face showed the strain he was under. However, it was he who set the price. But when Burton, thinking the matter closed, got out his check book, again the crippled trainer introduced the element of mystery.

"One minute, sir," he said. "There's something I ought to tell you. I'm sellin' Drake because I can't afford to take chances on his winnin'. But I want him to win, sir, just the same as if he was goin' to be mine."

"Well?" said Burton.

"There's one thing goin' to stand in his way. After this year I think he'll settle down. But right now, I'll be honest with you, Drake's a bolter. You know what a bolter is, I guess. He's a dog that won't keep in the course, that will run away. Drake's one of 'em. When you turn him loose in the field he forgets there's such things as human bein's on this planet. Don't I know him? I won the Southern Championship with him. I managed to keep up and hold him in. But I come mighty nigh ridin' a horse to death. Here's the price I paid myself, sir," and he tenderly felt his warped and shattered knee, "paid it the last five minutes of the race."

[Pg 56]

Burton was silent. Arnold went on:

"There's two people in the world Drake will listen to: One's me an' the other's Jessie. I can't run him, I'm stove up. Jess is expectin' to run him. If she does, he may win. If she don't, he won't win. I tell you, I know. I know that dog inside and out. Nobody but me or the girl can stop him when he gets started. He'll hunt where he darn pleases, or he'll strike a bee line for the next state. You know what that means, Mr. Burton. If you don't, Ferris does. The judges will rule him out."

But old Burton wanted that big young pointer though there were a *score* of wild devils in him. He wanted him worse than ever now he had heard. He had been a bolter himself when young—had run away from home. He liked bolters. But, also, he wanted to win the championship.

"Let the girl run him, then," he said. "Suits me. I'll pay her, and pay her well. If the dog wins, she'll get the stake."

Arnold flushed. "She'll run the dog, sir; but not for you. I mean, she won't run him if she knows it's for you. She's a high-strung girl—and proud; she mustn't know a thing about this deal. She must think she's runnin' her dog an' mine."

[Pg 57]

"Then you mean to deceive her in the matter?" demanded Burton.

Again Arnold flushed. "Sometimes, Mr. Burton, a man has to do a thing he don't like to do. I'll have to deceive the girl until after the trial. It ain't easy. I lay awake all night last night, after I got your telegram. It's this way, sir. I have to tell you in order for you to understand: If I can tell the bank positively that I'll have three thousand dollars in a month, I can renew a note I've got to renew—or lose the place here. That's the reason I'm sellin' Drake. But if I tell Jess now that I have sold him, even if she consents to run, the life won't be in her to handle him. It'll take it all out of her, sir. She'll be ashamed in the midst of all them people. She's a high-strung girl.

"And that brings me to the matter of the check you started to write," he went on. "I don't want that check now. Ever since I was laid up Jess has tended to things for me. You know how women are when they take charge. If that check's in the house she's liable to find it. If I deposit it, in a little town like this, people will find it out, and somebody'll blab to her. You send it to me after the trial, when I'm ready to explain to the girl without ruinin' your prospect of winnin', an' Drake's. That's my condition."

As he went up the street toward the station, Burton heard from behind the cottage the challenging bark of the championship hope—his dog now.

[Pg 58]

"Ferris," he said, "I believe we've got the champion this time. I think I'll attend that trial myself."

For more than a generation, the National Championship, bird-dog classic of America, had been run near Breton Junction where, two weeks later, Burton got off the train and was met by Ferris.

"Your dog's here, sir," was Ferris's whispered greeting. "Wilder looking than ever. The girl's here, too. Jim Arnold couldn't come. Laid up with his knee."

Burton looked around. He had reached a spot where for a few weeks every winter the bird dog is undisputed king. Down the sunlit village streets pointers and setters were out with their handlers. They came from every section of the country, from Canada, from England. Each dog represented in himself the survival of the fittest. There was not one who had not gained a victory in some trial. Now they were to try for the greatest victory of all.

Many were already champions with majestic names—champions of the South, the prairies, the Pacific coast. Some, younger and more eager than others, strained at their leashes, and looked about alertly at the passing show. Others, reserved veterans, gazed into space with the dignified abstraction of those who have travelled far and seen the world and tasted the vanity of all things under the sun.

[Pg 59]

On the way to the boarding-house where Ferris had engaged a place for him, Burton came face to face with his dog. He was pulling hard at the leash, held by the girl. She nodded and smiled quickly, wistfully, at these men who had been to her father's house to see her father's dog. But she did not stop or speak; for so strong was the pull of the big pointer that she was hurried along as if a high wind were blowing her from behind.

Old Burton stopped and looked back at them. His dog was the finest fellow of the bunch. He would take that dog back with him, National Champion tacked to his name. He would keep him in his own kennels, show him to his friends, run him again next year, own him in name as well as in fact.

As for the girl, it would be a big disappointment to her when she learned the truth. But she was young. Young people get over things quickly. Besides, it was her father's arrangement, not his. He wasn't responsible.

But when at supper in the boarding-house he saw her at the other end of the table, he was a bit sorry. This was rather too forcible a reminder of the bargain. He noticed that the girl was browned with Southern suns, but that she was pretty and looked thoroughbred. Also, she was very quiet, and her manners were nice.

She was present again at the meeting of handlers and owners and club officials, who packed the parlours and hall after supper. She was to be the first woman who ever ran a dog in a National Championship race, he heard somebody say. It occurred to him that she must be pretty brave, for she didn't seem to be the pushing kind.

[Pg 60]

The order in which dogs are to run is decided by lot. He had hoped Drake would be drawn for the first week. But in the lottery Drake came on Friday. "Arnold's Drake," he heard the official read: "Owner, Jim Arnold; handler, Jessie Arnold—handling for her father."

"Will you stay over, sir?" whispered Ferris.

Burton nodded.

All day long, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, in morning and afternoon heats of three hours each, dogs were run in braces on the plantation of Steve Earle, who was, like his father before him, one of the judges. Gruelling heats they were that tested every nerve and fibre, run under the eyes of judges who saw every move.

As for Burton, he went out to the testing ground but once. He was not used to hard horseback riding, and he wanted to be fresh on Friday. But once every day, either in the morning or the afternoon, he saw the girl set out on her pony. She was learning the course, getting ready for her own race.

Most of the time when she wasn't riding the course, she spent with the dog, exercising him, all alone, on the streets of the town. Once when Burton went out to the barn lot to look at him, where he waited, chained to his kennel, the girl came, also. He watched her as she stooped before the eager dog, and stroked his head.

[Pg 61]

"Tired of waiting, old man?" she asked.

Again he reared up against her and looked into her face.

"Do you—er—think he will bolt?" asked Burton as they went back toward the house.

She stopped and looked him straight in the eyes; her own were brown, frank, high-spirited, like a boy's.

"No!" she said bravely. "I can handle him."

"She's over-confident, sir," declared Ferris when the two reached Burton's room. "She don't know what she's up against. She's nothing but a kid. That dog was born a bolter, and he will die a bolter."

On Thursday morning the girl spoke to Burton as they came out of the dining room. She was going to take Drake out to the edge of town for a practise run, she said. Would he care to go along? He had seemed to be so interested in Drake.

He had Ferris hire a car. One of the women of the house went with them. In the edge of the town Jessie took the dog out and, Burton and Ferris following, led him into a field. Here she snapped the leash.

"Go!" she cried.

He needed no such command. Like a white meteor he sped across the field and dashed into the woods. She called him, but he did not turn. Again and again the shrill command of her little nickel-plated whistle echoed in fields and woods. At last, in the direction he had taken, she started running swiftly. Behind her hurried the two men, Burton breathing hard.

[Pg 62]

"This will never do!" gasped Ferris.

"Leave it to her!" commanded Burton.

At last, on top of a ridge, half a mile away, he reappeared. Three times shriller and shriller she blew, and now he came galloping toward them.

"Come in!" she commanded.

He came to her, and she caught him quickly by the collar.

"I told you I could handle him!" she said proudly.

But her eyes were dilated. She was quiet on the ride home. She was silent at the table.

Ferris joined his boss when the latter went to his room. Ferris stopped with the postmaster down the street, as he had stopped for twenty years when he was handling other men's dogs.

Ferris was depressed. That showing, he said, was terrible. If he bolted to-day, what would he do to-morrow, with another dog to spur him on and the crowd to excite him. They ought to do something—warn her, advise her.

Burton smoked away. "Suppose we just leave it to the girl, Ferris," he said quietly.

She was gone when next morning he came down to breakfast. She had left with the wagon that hauled her dog to the place of trial, the other diners said. Not once during the night or the morning had she let him out of her sight.

[Pg 63]

The crowd, all mounted, had gathered at the beginning of the course when Burton and Ferris rode up that brilliant winter morning. And a little to one side, standing beside a wagon in which were two dog's crates, one containing Arnold's Drake, the other Count Redstone, his brace mate, stood the girl.

At her side a wiry Texas pony waited patiently. In a scabbard on the saddle was strapped a twenty-gauge shotgun.

The girl looked small, slight, and brown in her riding suit. Underneath a roughrider hat Burton glimpsed her face as she looked off across the fields that marked the beginning of the course. Though brave and composed, it showed the strain she was under. In that crate nearest her, as she thought, was the hope of her crippled father.

Burton noticed that she did not glance up at the people about her, or speak to them. Her eyes were fixed on those sunlit straw fields, so soon to be her battleground. He liked her silence. From the beginning she had played the game—had asked no odds because she was a woman. He thought of his own youngest daughter. Suppose she were standing there, as that girl stood!

When the three judges rode up, she herself lifted the big pointer out of the crate. Once more he reared up on her, once more her hand stroked his head. Then, at a command of the judges, she was leading him into the field, her pony following; at her side walked the handler of Count Redstone, and in front of him, the Count strained at his leash.

[Pg 64]

"Are you ready?" asked the senior judge.

Count Redstone's handler, a bronzed, gray-haired veteran, said "Ready!" as he had said it a hundred times. The girl merely looked up at the judge and nodded.

"Let go!" ordered the judge.

Burton saw the dogs dash away. The girl, like an athlete, sprang into her saddle. Both handlers galloped after their dogs. Behind followed the judges, then, after an interval, the field, among them old Burton, his heart beating fast. The fight was on—but it was more than a fight between dogs. It was a conflict between a girl's will and the wild heritage in a dog's nature.

The dogs have to be kept within a course some half-a-mile wide and many miles long. If a dog gets out of the course and is lost for a length of time—that varies according to the conception of the judges, but is usually confined to half an hour—that dog is ruled out. This much Burton knew. The question was whether the girl by her whistle and the wave of her handkerchief to right and left could keep the dog within the course. The test is, which dog will find the most birds in that course and handle them with the greatest speed and dash.

[Pg 65]

At first the girl succeeded in handling her dog, though she had to ride hard to do so. Far ahead of the judges she kept, a slim figure against the hills. Now and then came the shrill of her whistle and the wave of her handkerchief. Then it began to be rumoured among the field that she had lost him. But not for long. On top of a hill she appeared, her right arm thrown up high. Judges, then the field, galloped toward her. The upraised hand meant her dog had scored—had found birds.

Burton, spurring up his horse, kept up with the crowd. There, in the midst of a straw field, head up, tail straight out, stood the pointer. The girl had dismounted, taken the little gun out of the scabbard, and was advancing, slim, straight, flushed of cheek, toward him.

"Flush your birds!" ordered the senior judge.

The birds rose with a whirr; the little gun barked; the pointer dropped to his haunches; it was perfect work.

"Go on, old man!" she ordered.

Then she was running back to her pony, which Ferris was holding for her. Again Burton saw in her face the strain she was under. How precious was every moment with a wild dog like this! She rammed the little gun in the scabbard, sprang into the saddle, hardly seeming to touch the stirrups, and was off.

[Pg 66]

Again Drake scored, then Count Redstone. Nearly an hour had flitted away. Then Burton, loitering among the rearmost of the field, heard rumours that something was wrong, and, anxiously spurring up his mount, came upon a body of horsemen gathered in a patch of woods.

Out yonder in a cotton field, he could see the three judges gathered on their horses like consulting generals on a battlefield. They had called time, the men explained to Burton, until Jessie Arnold could find her dog. A short distance from the judges Count Redstone was sitting on his haunches, panting, and beside him stood his handler, dismounted. This was giving Count Redstone a chance to rest, and the handler was taking full advantage of it.

Some of the men, the group explained to Burton, were scouting for the girl, among them Ferris. They were riding about the fields and woods outside the course, looking for her dog. The rest of them had better stay here; the judges would not allow too many helpers. The girl had ridden up yonder creek bottom, the last they saw of her. She was going like mad, they said.

But she was using her brains, they added. There are two kinds of bolters—those who run away for the sheer love of running, and those who from hilltops pick out the country that looks like containing birds, and make for that country of their own sweet will. Arnold's Drake belonged to the latter class. The girl was looking for him in the "birdy" spots. But heaven only knew how far he had taken it into his head to go! Old Burton got out his handkerchief and mopped his face. Five minutes passed, then ten—and still Arnold's Drake was lost, and out yonder the judges waited.

[Pg 67]

Then across the field toward the group in the woods came the girl. Off to the side of these woods were extensive fields of broom straw that lay outside the course. But they looked "birdy," those fields, and the girl was making for them.

As she swept past, Burton glimpsed her face. It was tense with anxiety, but the little mouth was set in a straight line. Her pony was flecked with foam; his eyes were wild; and Burton heard his hoarse panting and the pounding of his hoofs.

Careless of tree limbs, the girl swept through the woods. It came over Burton that, in this way, and, in trying to keep up with this very dog, her father had broken his knee. He wheeled his own horse about and tried to follow. But she had disappeared in her mad search; even the sound of her pony's hoofs had died away. Burton drew up his horse, and looked at his watch. Fifteen minutes had passed, and still the judges waited. Again Burton mopped his face with his handkerchief.

He had been an object of admiration among the men, and now they gathered about him. The faces of them all showed with what sympathy they were watching Jess Arnold's gallant fight. Again Burton looked at his watch. Twenty minutes—and the judges still waited out yonder, and Count Redstone rested.

[Pg 68]

"Can't we do something?" demanded Burton.

Not a thing, they said. Leaving out the fact that the judges would not permit many scouts, it wasn't good for a crowd to ride over the fields. The dog would see them, from a distant hill, perhaps, think he was going right, and keep on. It was all over, anyway, one man ventured: Arnold's Drake was out of the race. It was a pity, too. But for the bolting he was a great dog. They began to talk of this race as of something that might have been.

Then a man cried out excitedly, "Yonder she comes now! She's got him, too! That girl don't give up—she don't know how!"

Burton saw her galloping toward them, and with her the wild dog.

"Is time up?" she panted, reining in her pony.

"Five minutes!" said Burton.

"He was on birds!" she gasped. "But he was off the course. Five minutes, you say?"

She threw herself from the saddle. A man caught the reins of her panting, foam-flecked pony, and she was down on the ground beside the dog, while the others gathered about her. She had made the dog lie down. She was stroking him.

"You devil!" Burton heard her gasp. "You darling! You beauty! You wonder! Oh, I love you, but you don't love me—me or Dad!" [Pg 69]

She was oblivious now of the men about her. The slim hand was stroking the head, the long back, quietly, smoothly. "Steady!" she was pleading. "Steady, old man. Look at me!" She had caught his head and raised his eyes to hers. "Can't you see? Oh, you beauty—can't you see? See what it means! Now, now—be quiet—just a minute—quiet—quiet—steady—steady!"

The frantic panting was growing less; but still the wild fire blazed in the amber-brown eyes. Once he started to rise, but she pushed him gently back. Again she lifted his head, and looked at him long, pleadingly.

"Can't you see?" she said. "Can't you see?"

And now there came a change, visible to Burton, and to them all. The panting stopped altogether, the dog choked and swallowed. The pricked, eager ears fell back gently against the long thoroughbred head. The wildness faded out of the eyes that stared into the girl's face, and in them came the light of love, the dawn of understanding.

"You see now, don't you?" she said quietly.

She rose to her feet. He did not move, but lay there looking up at her humbly, wonderingly. She stood above him a moment and still he did not move.

"Time's up!" said one of the men tensely.

She nodded to show she had heard. It was as if she might break the spell if she spoke. The man led the pony to her. With no haste, now, she got into the saddle. [Pg 70]

"Heel!" she commanded.

The pointer rose and looked up at her.

"Heel!" she repeated.

When she rode out of the woods, across the sunlit fields toward the judges, at her pony's heels trotted the pointer, obedient now, as if he had left behind him, in that patch of woods, his wild heritage.

No man or woman who saw the work of Arnold's Drake the rest of that morning can ever forget it. Fast as ever, yet he kept the course. Bold, independent, aggressive, yet at every shrill whistle he turned, and according to the wave of her handkerchief went to right or left.

Ten coveys of birds, in the hour and a half that remained to him, he found. From terrific speed men saw him flash ten times into the statuesque immobility of a point. They forgot even so steady and painstaking a fellow as Count Redstone. It was the pointer who captured their imaginations.

On Saturday night, while the crowd was at supper, the decision of the judges, who always stopped at Freedom Hill, was telephoned in. And the decision showed them to be dog men, not martinets—men who can overlook a grievous fault in the face of a magnificent accomplishment and a future full of promise.

A veteran reporter took the message, then stood in the dining-room door a moment, his eyes twinkling at the faces turned his way. [Pg 71]

"Champion," he said, and paused a moment, "Champion, Arnold's Drake."

But when the girl declared she must telegraph her father, old Burton pushed through the crowd about her.

"I'll attend to that," he said.

He saw the quick friendliness in her upraised eyes. Had he not shown faith throughout in her dog?

Out in the hall he spoke to the men: "Telephone Ferris," he said. "He's stopping with the postmaster. Tell him to come at once."

In his own room he got out his stationery and pen and wrote, quickly, in a bold hand that dashed across the sheet. But the excitement of it must have told on him, for he dated the letter two days back, on Thursday.

When the door opened he looked up. There was Ferris, his face jubilant. Behind Ferris was the girl. At sight of her old Burton did a funny thing. He put his hand over the letter he had been writing.

"I just wanted to be sure," she said—"Dad, you know."

"I'll attend to that," he said impatiently.

After she was gone he hastily addressed the letter.

"Close the door, Ferris," he said. "You know the postmaster well, don't you? You've known him for years. Well, tell him he won't get into any trouble over this. Tell him it's often done. Tell him if he does get into trouble, I'll make it all right. Tell him he'll be glad he got into it. Tell him to stamp [Pg 72]

this letter two days back—January 27th—and mail it to-night. Send a telegram signed 'Jessie' to old Arnold, saying his dog—his dog, mind you—is National Champion. Hurry now!"

Late the next afternoon a crippled dog handler tore open a letter. It had come on the same train with his daughter and with the National Champion, who now lay before the fire. As his master opened the letter this champion looked up, and tapped the floor with his tail.

Beside her father stood Jessie, amazed at what she saw in the letter.

Thursday morning, January 27.

DEAR SIR:

I have just seen your dog work out in a preliminary test. He's a far worse bolter than even you had led me to believe. According to your representation, your daughter could handle him. I find her absolutely incapable of doing so. Under the circumstances I feel justified in cancelling our agreement. Yours truly,

WILLIAM BURTON.

"The old quitter!" cried Arnold, his eyes blazing. "God knows I'm glad to get my dog. Three thousand couldn't get him now. But who would have thought——"

And eyes still blazing with anger and joy and excitement, he told the girl at his side the bargain they had made, right in this room. [Pg 73]

For a moment she was silent, with staring eyes; then she cried out:

"Dad—Dad—he wrote the letter that night—after Drake was made champion. I know—I saw him doing it. He tried to hide it.... I know!"

On the train that very night, in the stateroom, Ferris spoke to his boss.

"I know a man, sir, who owns a dog I believe will win next year."

In the deep-set eyes came a twinkle that lit them up like tiny electrics.

"Has the man a broken leg and a daughter?"

"No, sir."

"Then buy the dog, Ferris."

IV

[Pg 74]

OLD FRANK SEES IT THROUGH

It was with grave misgiving that old Frank, Irish setter, followed little Tommy Earle out of the precincts of the big shaded yard and into the hot field of rustling corn, twice as tall as they. That this morning of all mornings the boy belonged back there in the yard he knew well enough, but all his efforts to keep him there had failed. He had tried to divert his mind. He had loitered behind. He had glanced back wistfully at the big white house, hoping in the absence of the boy's father and mother to attract the attention of old Aunt Cindy the cook to the fact that Tommy was running away.

But old Aunt Cindy was nowhere to be seen. There was no one to catch his signals of distress. There was no one to see Tommy enter the corn. And no one knew what he knew—that strangers were camped down there in his master's woods. As for him, he had smelled them the night before after everybody was asleep. He had barked a while in their general direction, then gone down there to investigate. They had not seen him, for he had kept out of sight. There had been two men and a woman sitting by a small fire, an old car in the background. He had not liked their looks. [Pg 75]

And that wasn't all. Not long ago he had seen one of the men, half hidden in the cornfield, looking toward the house. The man had stood there while Steve Earle, the boy's father, drove off in the car. He had stood there while Marian Earle, the boy's mother, went off across the orchard in another direction with a basket of fruit for a neighbour. He had stood there until Frank, left alone with the boy, had started toward the cornfield, tail erect, eyes fierce. Then the man had turned hurriedly and entered the woods.

But the man was still down there. So were those other people. Frank's nose told him that. Therefore his eyes were deep with trouble and he followed close at the boy's heels. Tommy's objective he knew well enough. A few days before Steve Earle had brought them both through this very corn, into the woods, to the creek. The father had pointed out to the boy the silvery fish darting here and there in a deep-shaded pool. It had made a great impression. Tommy was going to see those fish now. That Frank knew.

And he sympathized with the impulse, so far as that was concerned. Under ordinary circumstances, he was not averse to looking at fish himself. But now, with every step the boy took

his anxiety increased. For it was beside the pool that the strangers were camped. And it was straight in their direction that little Tommy in his ignorance was headed. [Pg 76]

The morning sun blazed down through the thin obstacle of the tall corn. It flashed on the white-and-striped shirt and trousers and on the turn-down straw hat with the blue-ribbon band. In the deep-furrowed rows dust puffed up from under the hurrying little sandalled feet. Intent on seeing those darting silvery fish in that deep-shaded pool, Tommy did not once turn to look into the troubled eyes close behind him.

Within sight of the woods Frank made his last attempt. He stopped and sat down firmly on his haunches. Then the boy turned, his face flushed under the white hat.

"Come on, F'ank!" he said impatiently.

A gust of dry summer wind swept across the field and rattled the blades of corn and tossed up the silvery side of the leaves in the forest.

The boy grew angry. "Come on, F'ank!" he cried.

Panting hard, saliva dripping into the dust of the corn row, Frank sat where he was and looked everywhere but at the boy in the dignity of his determination.

"Sit there, then!" said Tommy. "I'm goin'!"

He went; and Frank went, too; for obedience, even against his judgment, is the penalty a dog has to pay who loves a boy—and will die for him if need be.

In contrast with the bright glare of the cornfield it was dark in the woods, like passing from out of doors into the cool, shaded living room back home. Here and there shafts of sunlight pierced the dense foliage and touched leaves and tree trunks with silver spots. Down the heavy-wooded slope the boy went, but more cautiously now. Suddenly he stopped breathless, Frank beside him with pricked ears. At the same time the two men, both at work on the car down there by the pool, both burly and flushed of face, glanced quickly around. [Pg 77]

A moment they stared; then they began to talk, low, excitedly. The woman came around from the other side of the car. She was young, slim, strong; she was in a crimson shirtwaist and on her cheeks were spots of red. She, too, glanced at boy and dog, then joined the talk of the men. "No! No!" she cried. They brushed her aside; she ran quickly back to them; they brushed her aside again. Finally one of them pushed her into the car, pulled the shabby curtains down, and got in himself. The other man came forward, a smirking smile on his heavy red face.

Close to the boy stood Frank, his challenging eyes fastened on that smirking face. But Tommy, looking up with that eagerness to trust common to all young things from children to puppies, answered the man's questions in his clear boy's voice. Many times before, at Tom Belcher's store, at the Hunt Club, at country fairs, strangers had stopped thus to talk to him, had asked him who he was, where he lived, if his dog would bite. Many times before such strangers had smiled down into his upturned face. [Pg 78]

"We got lots of things in the car," the man was saying, "apples, peaches, circus things. We been to a circus. Did you see the lady?"

"I did!" said Tommy, breathless, his eyes big.

"Well, you come along with me. The lady wants to show you them circus things."

Just a moment Tommy hesitated. He looked up wistfully into the smiling face and into the narrowed eyes that somehow frightened him. Then he glanced toward the car and smiled in ecstasy. That rolled-up tent strapped on behind was striped red-and-white like tents at the fair: merry-go-round tents, tents with shawled women who held your hand and told you what was going to happen. The woods became suddenly alive with romance, luring him to see. He hesitated no longer. He went with the man, one hand on his hat brim as if the wind were blowing. Close behind, panting, followed old Frank.

The car flecked with spots of light looked big here in the woods like a strayed elephant. The other man, on the front seat, his hand on the wheel, glanced over his shoulder as they approached. In his wide-brimmed hat he looked like the man who stands in front of tents and shouts for people to come in and see. Half concealed by the curtains and by bundles, the woman, her face strangely white except for red spots, sat on the back seat. Valises and suitcases with gaudy things sticking out of them were strapped here and there to the car. Tommy stopped and stared in wonderment at this travelling splendour. Close beside him stood old Frank, fierce-eyed, wise, suffering. [Pg 79]

"Get in, son," said the man at the wheel, his voice gruff and husky. "We're goin' to take you to your ma. You ain't got no business down here in the woods alone. Quick now—no fooling!"

But Tommy drew back.

"Is—is F'ank goin'?"

"Sure. Let the dog in, Bill."

The red-faced man slammed the door on boy and dog and clambered heavily into the front seat. The lumbering car lurched and swayed along the unused wood road. It was stifling hot in here

with the curtains down, but old Frank, wedged in between bundles and suitcases, was panting with more than heat. And Tommy, into whose face he looked with flattened ears and eyes solemn with devotion, was suddenly pale.

Just ahead, the big road came into sight, shining in the sun. The car stopped. The woman against whose knees boy and dog were pressed in the crowded space was breathing fast. The crimson, sleazy shirtwaist rose and fell. Her face, in spite of the red spots, was pasty, as if she might faint. The men looked up and down the road, nodded grimly at each other, and the car started with a jerk. The scream of Tommy broke the terrible silence.

[Pg 80]

"That ain't the way! That ain't—!"

The red-faced man whirled around, caught the boy by the back of the neck and pressed the other hand over his mouth. And old Frank, rearing up in the crowded confusion, buried his shining fangs deep in that hand and wrist. The other man sprang out of the car, jerked the door open, and caught him by both hind legs.

"Don't stick him, Bill!" he gasped. "They'll find his body. Let him go home!"

Snarling, writhing, fighting, Frank was dragged out and hurled into the road. A savage kick sent him tumbling backward; the man sprang once more into the front seat. The car darted away, Frank after it, barking hoarsely in his rage and horror, his mouth flecked with bloody foam, the road flying dizzily underneath him.

All that blazing August day he followed the car—followed though at the next patch of woods it stopped and a man jumped out with a shotgun. He was a hunting dog; he knew what that meant. Like a big red fox caught prowling about after daylight, he sprang into the bushes and disappeared from sight. After that he did not show himself again. Where he could, he stayed in the woods, running parallel to the road like a swift, silent outrider. At open places he lagged shrewdly behind; by short cuts through fields, by spurts of speed at the next patch of woods, he caught up again. It was an old trick and a simple one; he had played it often before; but never, as now, with such gnawing anxiety, such bewilderment and rage in his heart.

[Pg 81]

Once, lumbering old rattletrap though it was, the car left him far behind. Then as he raced frantically along the dusty road under the fierce sun that beat down on his heavy red coat, his eyes were like a mad dog's eyes. But from the top of a long hill over which it had disappeared he glimpsed it again in the distance—glimpsed it just as it turned clumsily out of the highway and pointed its nose toward the distant mountains.

After this it was easy. A mongrel cur might have kept up, much less a seasoned thoroughbred. Up and down hill ahead of him the car swayed and wallowed laboriously in an unused, gully-washed road. There was constant shade in which to stop and pant, there were frequent streams in which to lie for a moment, half submerged, and cool his boiling blood. Noon passed without any halt. The sultry afternoon wore slowly away. Still the big setter, his silver-studded collar tinkling slightly like tiny shining castanets, galloped after that disreputable car as if he belonged to it and had been left carelessly behind.

It never entered his head to turn back. Life was a simple thing to him. There were no pros and cons in his philosophy. Yet he watched every turn of that car, always on the alert, always ready to spring aside into the bushes if it stopped. That man had meant murder; to show himself meant death. He was a chauvinist, but he was no fool. The boy needed him alive, not dead.

[Pg 82]

But the first sight of the boy was almost too much for him. The car had turned out of the road at last. It bumped a while through woods, stopped, and he sank down behind a bush. The sun had just set. Yonder through a gap in the trees rose the dome of a heavy-wooded mountain. Above it a vast pink and white evening cloud boiled motionless into the sky. Beyond this mountain rolled the solid blue undulations of whole ranges. For miles they had not passed a house. The breathless heat of a wilderness hung over this place.

The men, stiff, dusty, hot, got out. The heavy man's hand was bandaged. Then the woman got out; then the boy. A great trembling desire seized the dog to rush forward, to let the boy know he was here. Every muscle quivered; he choked and swallowed; he looked off as if to avoid temptation. But one of the men pulled a shotgun out of the car and the dog bowed his head between his paws in a sort of shame. That was the symbol of his helplessness. That was what stood between his fangs and those men's throats.

He watched them strip the car of its baggage. They unstrapped the tent and dragged it off to the depths of a thicket beyond. Valises, telescopes, all the cheap pageantry of their trade, went the same way. They were staking everything on the prize that had walked into their hands that morning, coming like a little prince from that big white house that sat amidst its trees on the hill surrounded by broad fields rich with corn and tobacco and cotton.

[Pg 83]

At last the man who had driven the car picked up the gun. The woman, one arm full of bundles, took the boy by the hand. He drew back, looking up at her and holding to his hat. She spoke to him low and huskily, her face white. Then, as he perforce went with her, Frank heard him crying in the woods, heard the convulsive catches of his voice, saw the twinkle, through the trees, of white socks above reluctant, sandalled feet.

Eyes sullen and fierce, he rose and followed. Down the hill, where a creek gurgled, the man with the gun turned. He was hard-jawed, pale-eyed. The boy and woman stopped.

"Shut up!" he said.

The crying stopped; the convulsive sobs went on.

"Shut up!"

A few steps the dog rushed forward, hair risen all the way down his back. Then he sank down on the ground. For the woman had dropped the bundles and was on her knees before the boy, her arm about his heaving shoulders. Frank saw the whiteness of her face as she looked up at the man above her. Her voice rang through the woods, husky and shrill, but suppressed.

[Pg 84]

"He can't help it, Joe!"

The crying had stopped now. But the sturdy little chest was still rising and falling as the boy stood looking up with quivering face at the man. The woman picked up her bundles, rose, and took his hand once more. Still holding to his hat he went with her, in silence now, taking two little trotting steps to one of hers.

They spent the night in the woods, out of hearing of any chance passer-by along the road. Carefully hidden in the underbrush old Frank watched them. Only once did he leave them. Then he went to the car, found a big chunk of side-meat wrapped in a paper under the back seat, made his meal off his enemies, and came guardedly back, licking his chops. They were gone again before day. The rising sun found the car toiling upward into the echoing depths of the mountains. Just around the last bend in the road followed old Frank.

Sometimes he trotted, sometimes he broke into a gallop. Sometimes he stopped to drink at streams that came slipping down green walls of rock, crossed the road like snakes, and dived into the foliage below. His tongue hung out; he was gaunt, dust-covered, weary-eyed. The few mountaineers he passed looked at him with narrow suspicion, then back up the winding road where that curtained car had disappeared. With just a glance up into their faces, he galloped by.

[Pg 85]

But when another car, long, black, shining, like the one at home, swung suddenly around the bend just ahead, he stopped short. The weariness left his eyes, the stiffness went out of his muscles, his heart gave a great bound. Four sportsmen, such as he and his master associated with, bobbed comfortably up and down in the capacious seats of that approaching car. Their fishing rods were strapped to the side. He saw the shine of the sun on their ruddy faces, the twinkle in their eyes as they stopped.

"What's up, old man?" they asked.

Maybe he got a bit rattled. Anyway, he failed. He ran up the road in the direction of that other car, wheeled, and ran back. He jumped up on the step with his front paws, he looked up with pleading eyes from one face to another.

"Those folks left him behind," they said.

They assured him that it was a shame to treat a good old scout that way, but he could catch up if he kept plugging. They said if the road were not too narrow they would turn round, give him a lift and his people a piece of their minds. They threw him something to eat, they wished him good luck, and left him standing in the road, looking after them with disconsolate eyes.

After he had eaten the food and taken up his solitary pursuit, he heard in the road far below the sound of their car. Even their voices floated up to him between the narrow walls of the echoing gorge.

[Pg 86]

"I tell you," said one, "it was an S O S! We ought to have followed him. Something queer about that car."

But they were gone for all that, like the friends who, whether we be man or woman or dog, daily pass us by, willing to help if they only understood.

It was dusk when he caught up. The car had reached the flattened top of the lofty range it had been climbing all day. From behind a bush he watched it turn out of the road. Like some mammoth beast astray it bumped and swayed across a desolate field of broomstraw with borders that plunged abruptly off into space. In the middle of the field grew a black thicket of stunted pines, huddled densely together up here under the sky. On the side of the thicket away from the road the car stopped, and Frank crept into the pines and lay down. The men got out, then the woman, then the boy.

He saw Tommy looking all about in bewilderment at this roof of the world on which, a lonely little figure, he stood close to the woman. Again the longing seized the dog to rush forward, to let the boy know he, too, was here. But there were the men close by; and in the car was the gun. Again he bowed his head between his paws; and his eyes in the faint glow from the light that still lingered in the sky were deep with loneliness and trouble.

[Pg 87]

Suddenly the man who had driven the car turned. He glanced at the woman and the boy, then toward the road. He took his pipe out of his mouth.

"Here, you get back in that car, kid!" he said.

This time Tommy stood his ground sturdily, but his upturned face was white in the dusk, and he held tight to the skirt of the woman.

"Did you hear me?"

"He's dead tired, Joe!" snapped the woman.

The man took a sudden threatening step forward. In the thicket Frank rose quivering to his feet. But with a quick movement the woman had pushed the boy behind her. "Don't you touch him, Joe!" she flashed. A moment she stood facing him, slim, defiant in the dusk. Then she took the boy's hand and they went back to the car.

Suddenly Frank rose on his front legs, ears thrown back, eyes glowing wildly. It seemed to him that the boy had looked straight into the bushes where he lay. Certainly for a moment he had pulled back on the woman's hand. Then he went on with her and they got into the car. But Frank still sat on his haunches, panting and choking and panting again.

At last he crept along the edge of the thicket and lay there close to the car. He was still panting. That glimpse full into the boy's face had almost undone him. He was hungry for food, and hungry for human companionship. He wanted to go to the car, to rear up on the side to scratch at the curtains. But yonder, a hundred feet away, back and forth before a fire they had built, moved the men. And against the box they had taken from the car leaned the gun.

[Pg 88]

Within the car he heard the voice of the woman, low, confidential, assuring, and his ears flattened with gratitude and trust. The man wouldn't hurt him, she was telling the boy. Sometimes he talked to everybody that way. He was an old grouch, that's what he was. She whispered something.

"To-morrow?" the boy asked eagerly.

"Hush! Sure. That's it—to-morrow!"

"Did F'ank go home, Nita?"

"Sure he went home."

"I saw a dog in the bushes!"

The woman laughed. "You're seeing things, old scout. What about some supper?"

She got out of the car and went quickly to the fire the men had built. Without a word to them she gathered up something to eat and came quickly back. Even in the darkness Frank could see the light in her eyes.

The boy must have gone to sleep soon after that. The moon, big, weird, solemn, rose slowly over yonder parallel range of mountains. The men at the fire talked low and mumbling between long intervals. Presently the heavy man rose, skirted the thicket, and stumbled off across the field toward the road. The smell of him polluted the air no more. Then the woman came quietly out of the car and joined the other man at the fire.

[Pg 89]

"Where's he gone?" she asked.

"To get the lay of the land."

She sat down opposite him, her knees drawn up, her chin in her hand.

"Joe?"

"Well?"

"The kid's got me, Joe!"

He said nothing and she talked on, her voice low. Still he said nothing. Then she went over to him, sat down beside him, took his hand in hers. "Let's take him home!" she pleaded, her voice rising. "Let's make a clean breast of it. Let's begin all over again. Let's be straight. They'll give us a chance—I know they will. They're like the kid—white. I know they are. Let's turn round right now. I promised him we'd take him home to-morrow. I couldn't help it! Joe, Joe, I'd rather be dead than go on!"

She rose when he rose, clinging to him. He threw her off, she ran to him, and he threw her off again, his face distorted in the moonlight. "I'm tired of this sob stuff!" he cried. "We're in this thing and we're goin' to see it through!"

"You'll wake him!" she gasped.

"Let him wake! The daddy'll come across or I'll wring the brat's neck!"

[Pg 90]

"Oh!" she screamed.

She stared at him with white face, full of horror and fear and loathing. She turned and stumbled toward the car, the curtains closed upon her. Far in the night Frank heard her sobbing to herself.

His eyes were green with hatred as he followed the car the next day. A few crumbs of bread from

the deserted camping place, a taste of potted meat from a can he held fiercely between his paws while he licked the inside, had made his meagre breakfast. There were times that day when, if the men had looked behind, they must have seen him. There were times when he would not have cared if they had. Close around the bends, within sight sometimes where the road straightened, he trotted or loped wearily along, tongue lolling out, collar loose on his neck. So another day wore away and mid-afternoon came. Then the car stopped, and from force of habit, as it were, he turned aside for the last time into the bushes.

Suddenly his panting ceased, he raised his head, and pricked his ears. From the valley below had come the smell of human habitations mingled with the faint tinkle of a cowbell and the sound of a hammer. Eyes bright in an instant, he watched the man climb stiffly out of the car ahead. The other and bulkier man clambered from between the curtains of the rear where he had ridden all that day. They talked for a while low and guardedly. They glanced suspiciously up and down the rough road they had been following, then down a shaded road that led pleasantly to the valley below.

[Pg 91]

"There ain't an inch of gas left," said the man who had driven the car. "It's the last chance for fifty miles."

"Have you looked in the can?" asked the heavy man, his face worried.

"You saw me empty it last night, didn't you?" sneered the other.

He pulled a big can out of the car, then he parted the curtains.

"See here, kid, you want to keep damn quiet—hear?"

No sound came from within.

"Did you hear me?"

The voice sounded muffled in a sort of sob.

"Yes, sir!"

"All right. Remember! I'm comin' back."

He fastened the curtains together. He muttered directions to his uneasy companion. "You drive up to them bushes and wait." He put in his hip pocket something that flashed brilliantly, even pleasantly, in the sun, he put on his coat, picked up the can, and started down the shaded road. And old Frank, fierce eyes shrewd, hair risen all the way down his gaunt back, rose guardedly, crept through the bushes, came out in the road behind and followed.

[Pg 92]

Old Frank had been a companion of men all his days. He had hunted with them, shared their food and fire, looked up with steady, open eyes into their faces. He had never had a human enemy before. But now he stalked this man as his ancestors had stalked big game—muscles tense, head low between gaunt shoulder blades, eyes hard and bloodshot. When the man turned he would rush forward and spring at his throat.

But the man hurried on, and looked neither to the right nor left, nor behind him. Thus they came suddenly out of a wilderness into a village that straggled up the sides of mountains. There were glimpses of white cottages clinging to abrupt hillsides, or rambling steps leading to green summer lawns, or swings in the shade, or white-clad, romping children—children like Tommy Earle.

Yonder down the street glass knobs of telephone poles glistened in the sun. At the end of the street rose the white columns of a long building with a big, black, dust-covered car in front. Women in white, children with nurses, sallow mountain folk, were abroad in the first coolness of the afternoon. It was the busy season, when the heat of cities drives people to the fresh air of the mountains and a hundred such villages spring into life and laughter.

Through this holiday crowd went the red-faced, dusty man. Twenty paces behind followed the gaunt Irish setter. People stopped in the street to look back at him. Children pulled on their nurses' hands, thrilling to make friends with such a big dog, then pulled back, distrustful of the look in his eyes. Man, then dog, passed the drug store where behind plate-glass windows cool-dressed men and women sat at slender tables. Next to the drug store was a brick garage with a gasoline meter in front. About the entrance loitered a group of men watching. One was bigger than the rest and wore a wide-brimmed hat.

[Pg 93]

Through this group pushed the man with the ten-gallon can. Close behind now followed the gaunt Irish setter. It happened quickly, like one of those mountain tragedies that brood over such places, remnants of feuds that hang on to the skirts of civilization. Two muffled pistol shots broke the peace and security of the village and brought men running to the garage. For the man with the ten-gallon can had turned at last, and Frank had sprung straight at his throat.

From the confusion of crowding men came the hoarse shout,

"Turn me loose! Let me kill that dog! Can't you see? He's mad as hell!"

"I've got the dog all right!" cried the big man in the broad-brimmed hat. "If he's mad I'll 'tend to him!"

Plunging, barking, begging to be turned loose, old Frank was dragged backward across the cement floor. In the door of a glass-enclosed office the big man, holding tight to his collar, turned.

[Pg 94]

"Here—you—Sam!" he panted. "Run to the hotel. Tell Mr. Earle—the gentleman that just came with his wife—we got a man down here and a red Irish setter. Quick! Catch him before he leaves!"

Then they were in the office, and the door was shut. The big man had sunk breathless into a chair still holding to the dog's collar. He was quiet now. But the blood that dripped slowly on the floor was no redder than his eyes. The door opened and he plunged forward. But it was a stranger—a young man with a star on his coat.

"Sam got 'em, Sheriff," he said, "they're comin' now. Must I bring the man in here?"

"No. Keep him out there. This fellow's still seein' red."

"Hit?"

"Ear. That's all."

"Well, he left his mark on that devil, all right!"

The young man went out. Still the sheriff held the dog's collar. Still through the glass windows the crowd stared in. But suddenly it parted and then Frank saw them.

"Hold on!" panted the sheriff. "No use to tear the house down. They'll be in here in a minute!"

The door opened, they were in the office, the sheriff had turned him loose. He was jumping up against his tall master, long ears thrown back, upraised eyes aglow, heart pounding against his lean ribs. But it was the look in his young mistress's eyes that brought him down to the floor before her in sudden recollection that went straight to his heart, that set him all atremble with choking eagerness.

[Pg 95]

"Take us to him, Frank!" she gasped, her hands clenched tight against her breast.

He led them—master and mistress and strange officers, neighbours from back home, old Squire Kirby, Bob Kelley, John Davis—led them out of the town, up the shaded road across which slanting sunbeams gently sifted. He led them to that car he had followed secretly through the days and watched without sleep through the nights. Only his master's low-voiced command held him back with them.

"Steady, Frank! Steady, old man!"

But they must have made some noise, quiet as they tried to be. For before they reached the car the heavy man scrambled out, stared for a moment in stupid bewilderment, then threw both hands high up over his head.

"Don't shoot!" he pleaded hoarsely, his heavy face aquiver. "We ain't done the kid no harm!"

Then it was that Frank broke away and rushed at last to that curtained car. With shining eyes he sprang into the front, over the seat, into the rear. Tommy's arms were about his neck, Tommy was crying over and over to the woman, all out of breath:

[Pg 96]

"It's F'ank, Nita! He didn't go home. I saw him in the bushes!"

"It's your mother, too," she said. "Come after you." She tried to smile. "I told you it would be to-day—didn't I?" She snatched him to her and kissed him fiercely. She opened the door. "Good-bye, old scout," she whispered. Then she turned to Frank. "Go!" she panted and her lips trembled. "Go!"

Outside the car Frank stood by, quivering with pride while the boy passed from the mother's high up into the father's arms. He saw the light in their faces, the flash of the sun on the boy's curls, the smiles of the men who looked on. Then the shadow of terrible days and nights fell across his happiness and for the second time that day he saw red. For the woman had stepped out of the car, and the big sheriff had caught her by the arm.

The dog glanced up, bewildered, into the faces about him. But none of them had seen. He ran to the woman; he took his stand beside her, looking up at the sheriff with fierce, pleading eyes. But the sheriff still held her arm, and the dog growled, partly in anger, partly in trouble. Then Tommy saw, too. He wriggled loose from his father; he came running to their help.

[Pg 97]

"Let go of her!" he screamed, and caught the woman's skirt with both hands, "Papa, make him let her go!"

But it was his mistress who understood, who came to them with shining face and caught the woman by both hands. He knew it was all right now, even when the woman sank down on the car step and sobbed brokenly, her face buried in her hands. For the sheriff had stepped back, and his mistress was at her side, an arm about her shoulder.

"No, Sheriff," she said, looking up at him, and the sun sparkled in her eyes.

"We won't say anything about this, gentlemen," Earle said quietly to the men.

That night Frank lay in the crowded lobby of the hotel, ears pricked toward the wide-screened dining-room door. He had already had his supper, out in the rear courtyard near the kitchen where many dishes rattled.

"Two porterhouse steaks—raw," Steve Earle had said.

"And a big dish of ice cream," Marian Earle had added with a smile, for old Frank was an epicure in his way.

And now the sheriff was telling the crowd about him.

"He followed that car for two hundred miles. That was nothin'—been huntin' all his life. But he kept out of sight—that's the thing! They never saw him, and he never left them. That's what put us on the trail. That's the reason the boy's eatin' supper with his father and mother in there instead of bein' out in the woods with them brutes."

[Pg 98]

He puffed at his cigar.

"Some men fishing in the mountains passed him. He tried to flag 'em. Yes, sir—that's what he tried to do. But they didn't catch on. Might have, but didn't. Next day they read in the papers about a boy and Irish setter being lost. Then they caught on and telephoned Mr. Earle."

"The woman that came in with the mother and went upstairs with her," asked a man, "who's she?"

The big sheriff took the cigar out of his mouth and looked at the questioner with narrow, disapproving eyes.

"She didn't have a thing to do with it, sir!" he declared.

From the dining room came the sound of chairs pushed back, and Frank rose to his feet. He met them at the door, he stood beside the boy while the people gathered around, he went upstairs with them, the boy holding tight to his heavy red mane.

"That old Joe!" Tommy was saying breathlessly, as they went down the carpeted hall. "He can't get us any more. The sheriff he locked him up in a jail. He can't get Nita, either. Mama's goin' to take care of her. Mama says so!"

[Pg 99]

He was still talking, his eyes big, when they went into a brightly lighted room where a little bed set beside a big one. He was still talking while his mother undressed him. Then before he got into bed a spasm of virtuous reaction seized him. He and F'ank were never going to leave the yard any more, he declared. They never were going to get in any more automobiles with people!

"No," smiled Earle from his great height down at the little figure in borrowed pyjamas, "I guess you're cured, old man!"

The rug beside Tommy's bed was very soft, and Frank was very tired. But sometime in the silent darkness of that night he barked hoarsely in the agony of a dream. For they were on top of a mountain, and a weird moon had risen, and a woman had screamed.

V

[Pg 100]

AN ACT OF GOD

There must have been something prophetic in Mac's fear of thunder when he was a puppy. For, though all puppies are afraid of it, and most grown dogs for that matter, still, Mac's fear, according to Tom Jennings, his master, was more than that of the ordinary dog. That is, until the blow came. After that it was different with Mac.

Maybe he thought, having smitten him once, that lightning would smite him no more. Maybe some change had taken place in his nature which we humans cannot analyze or understand. Let this be as it may, the fact is that Mac, after his second year, feared thunder no more.

In law a stroke of lightning is known as an Act of God. If such is the case, it seems strange that this stroke should have fallen on Sunday night and in a God-fearing and God-serving household. As a matter of fact, Tom Jennings, his wife and three children had just driven home from church at Breton Junction and Tom, assisted by Frank, his boy of sixteen, had put up the horses. Then, as the cloud was an unusually threatening one, they all gathered in the parlour.

[Pg 101]

It was the ordinary parlour of country people who are self-respecting but neither well-to-do nor educated. There was a fancy organ, a flowered carpet; there were gaudy vases and solemn-looking enlarged crayon portraits. Near a stiffly curtained window was a sort of family altar—a table on which lay a family Bible. This Bible, a ponderous embossed volume with brass guards and clasps, reposed on a blue-velvet table cover that almost reached the floor. On the cover was worked a cross and a crown with the legend: "He Must Bear a Cross Who Would Wear a Crown."

When, the storm having burst on this household, Mac scratched at the door, Tom Jennings himself, a tall, raw-boned, sunburnt man, rose and let him in with some good-humoured remark.

Mac was a young setter, with white, silken, curly coat and black, silken, curly ears. He looked self-consciously into the faces of the family, who were smiling at his fears; then, with a queer expression on his face, as if he, too, knew it was funny, he went to the family altar, pushed aside the embossed velvet cover, and lay down under the table. The children laughed, Tom Jennings and Frank, a lanky, handsome, serious-faced lad smiled. Mac always did this in a thunderstorm.

Just before the blow came, they heard him, as if he were still reflecting humorously upon his fears, tap the floor with his tail. Immediately there was the shiver of broken glass, a crash, a child's suppressed scream, and for a moment, as the lamp went out, blackness. But only for a moment; for next, above the shining brass trimmings of the Bible, there glowed for several vivid seconds blue-and-white flames like a halo.

[Pg 102]

There was no very clear recollection of what happened afterward. Having assured himself that wife and children were safe, Tom Jennings, followed by the boy Frank, ran out into the yard by the side door which they left open, and looked at the roof of the house. If any fire had started it had been drowned at once by deluges of rain. When father and son returned, Mrs. Jennings had lit another lamp. Here they all were, with white faces. Only Mac was gone.

For the better part of three days they searched for him, in the attic, in the cellar, in the barns and outhouses, in the woods near by. On the afternoon of the third day, Jennings stooped down and peered underneath the corn crib. It was set low to the ground, and two sides were boarded up. On the unboarded side weeds had grown. It was quite dark underneath.

At first he could not be sure what that dim suggestion of white he made out could be. Then he pushed aside the weeds and peered more closely, his eyes the while growing more accustomed to the dark. Finally he straightened up and called loudly:

[Pg 103]

"Here he is, folks!"

They all came running, Mrs. Jennings leaving her supper to burn if need be, Frank dropping his ax at the woodpile. When they reached him, Tom Jennings was stooping down and pleading:

"Come, Mac! Come, old man! We are all here."

But the white figure did not stir.

At last Frank wormed his long, adolescent body underneath the sleepers of the crib, caught hold of the front paws, and pulled the setter gently forth. They examined him all over, but at first they could find no sign of injury. It was Frank who saw and understood. Frank had always had a way of knowing what was the matter with animals.

"He's blind," said the youth.

Some of the neighbours, when they heard, said Jennings ought to put him out of his misery. But no such thought ever entered the head of any member of the Jennings family. They built him a kennel underneath the bedroom window. They taught him where to find his plate of food on the kitchen steps. Soon he learned to find his way about the yard.

At first he ran into things—into the corner of the house, into the woodpile, or into the chicken coops. He never whimpered when he did so, but looked humbled and ashamed. At last he located each object, calculated respective distances, and before the summer was over he avoided obstacles as if he had had eyes.

[Pg 104]

You would not have known he was blind but for the fact that when he drew near the steps or near a door—he learned to open screen doors with his paws—he would raise his front foot, and feel about like a blind man with a stick.

One day at dinner Jennings spoke to his family. "I don't want any of you children ever to leave anything about the yard that he can stumble over. Mother, whenever you move a chicken coop, call him and show him where it is, hear?"

They all agreed.

Then Mac began to follow his master to the field and to Tom Belcher's store up the road. Neighbours grinned and said they had often heard of a blind man led by a dog, but never before of a blind dog led by a man. They never said this, though, in Tom Jennings's presence.

As summer waned and hunting season approached, Tom Jennings, a great hunter, bought a pointer to take the place of Mac in the field, and in order that there might be no jealousy and no quarrelling, he bought a female.

It was hard to have to leave Mac at home on the first day of the winter's hunting. Though Tom had tried to keep the matter of his going a secret, the blind dog had sensed the preparations. He had smelled the oiling of boots. He had heard the click of shells dropped into hunting-coat pockets. And at the end, the frantic barkings of the pointer, whom Tom had tried in vain to keep silent, told him as plainly as a shout. Mac tried to follow and they had to chain him up.

[Pg 105]

In the middle of the afternoon Mrs. Jennings turned him loose. He stayed close to her skirts for a while, following her in and out of the kitchen and about the yard. But as the time drew near for the return of the hunters, he began to sniff the air in every direction, his nose held high.

At last he smelled them coming across the fields and made his way eagerly through the yard and

toward them. And now it was, as he saw the blind dog coming, that a happy thought struck Tom Jennings. Instead of coming to the house he waited at the edge of the yard; and when Mac reached him, he took out of his hunting coat a quail and handed it to the dog.

"Take it to the missus," he said.

Straight to the kitchen wing and up the steps the dog went, happy and proud. Mrs. Jennings opened the door, face beaming. The children all ran out to see. And though it consumed time Tom remained where he was and handed the blind dog bird after bird. After that, this procedure came to be a regular part of Tom Jennings's hunts.

Soon Mac learned to rear gently up on the kitchen table and place the birds on the top. Each bird he placed near the preceding one, rooting them gently with his nose into a conical pile. "Mac's pile" it came to be called by the children, returning from school and hurrying into the kitchen. And while they talked to him and bragged about what a nice regular pile he had made, he would stand with wagging tail, his sightless eyes raised to their faces as if he saw.

[Pg 106]

Another summer passed, a summer of other thunderstorms, of which he was afraid no more. Another bird season rolled around. And then, one day, he begged so hard with his unseeing eyes that Tom let him go. After that Tom always let him go. For a wonderful thing had happened. Blind Mac was no longer useless! He could hunt birds!

First he seemed to be backstanding Nell, the pointer; that is, when she set, he advanced slightly in front of Tom and set, too. But since he could not see, it was plain that it was the birds themselves he was setting and not Nell. Then, a little later in the same day, and while Nell was nowhere in sight, he suddenly trotted ahead and came to a beautiful stand. All excited, Tom advanced, and a covey of birds rose. The gun barked twice and two birds tumbled. "Fetch, Mac!" cried Tom. And straight to the dead birds the unerring nose took him, and he retrieved them both, trembling with joy.

From this time he was an object of charity no more. Had Tom Jennings not been a man of tender heart, but only a hunter out after meat, he still would have taken Mac along. Just as in people when one sense is destroyed others grow more than normally keen, so with Mac. Never, declared Tom, could a dog smell birds so far; never did bird dog have a nose that told him so exactly where they were.

[Pg 107]

Fortunately, the route over which Tom hunted lay in extensive river bottoms, cultivated in corn. There were few fences and Mac soon learned where they were. There were no woods, and only an occasional thicket that Mac could circle with a fair degree of safety. The pointer did all the wide ranging.

Now and then Mac fell into a ditch or creek. It was always pitiful to Tom Jennings to see this. But each time the blind dog found his way out and went on undaunted, head high, tail wagging as if with a perpetual and inward joy.

"I've seen some blind folks," said Tom once to his wife, "that looked happier than folks with eyes. Mac looks happier to me than dogs that can see. It's funny."

So the years passed, and blind Mac came to be a familiar figure, and the children grew, and Tom Jennings worked hard on his farm to give them an education.

First Frank, the lad, outgrew the country schools, just as he outgrew his clothes. He was a hardworking, serious-minded, intelligent boy. Then the girls, both bright, reached the next to the last grade in the country school. And Tom Jennings and Martha Jennings his wife determined that each of them should have a college education. So Tom worked very hard and Martha saved very closely. And the fall day came when Frank left home to go to college in Greenville; then another day, the fall following, when the girls left, also. Thus Martha and Tom and Mac were left alone on the farm.

[Pg 108]

"You know," said Tom once (he was a simple, religious man), "I sometimes think it's a strange thing, Mother, that that poor dog should have been struck while he was takin' shelter under the Word of God. I know he ain't nothin' but a dog, but I reckon God made him. I don't see why God struck him."

"Maybe there was purpose in it, Tom," said his wife.

Then hard luck came to Tom Jennings just at the time when the bills for the children's second matriculation were due. First, the river rose and drowned some of his cattle and ruined a good deal of corn that had not been gathered. He worked hard, even desperately, to save what he could and not let the children know. Then Tom himself was taken with a queer feeling in the chest, a feeling of tightness and dull pain and shortness of breath. Martha pleaded with him a long time to consult a doctor in Greenville before he consented to do so.

The doctor listened with a stethoscope placed on the farmer's chest. "Sit down, Jennings," he said at last. "Jennings, your heart leaks. You've overstrained it. You must never do any more hard manual work."

[Pg 109]

"But, Doctor——" Tom began.

"No buts about it. You are too good a man to drop off. You must go slow. You mustn't even walk fast. You must never run, and you must not lift heavy weights. Why don't you sell your farm and

move to town?"

"But the children, Doctor. I'm trying to give 'em a better chance than I had or their mother."

"That's all right, Jennings. But we have to trim our sails to meet life as it is. Your heart leaks, man! You've done what you could for your children. They'll just have to shift for themselves."

Tom Jennings drove slowly home. Martha, not knowing the purpose of his visit to town that day, had gone to see Mrs. Taylor, a neighbour. Even Mac was not in the yard to welcome him. He put up his horse, then sat down on the back steps to do the hardest thinking he had ever done.

At first it seemed to him like providence that just recently Tom Belcher had offered to buy the farm. In fact, he was calling him up every day about it. He could sell it to-morrow and then he could move to Greenville. The children were paying part of their expenses. But without his help, two of them at least would have to leave college. What was more, they would have to go to work to help him now. The interest from what he could get for the farm would not keep him going—and farming was the only thing he knew how to do. [Pg 110]

But why shouldn't they help him? He had already done for them more than any neighbour had done for his children. True, his greatest ambition would be unrealized. But, as the doctor said, you had to trim your sails in this life. Why should he carry on a fight when he had been stricken? God did not expect a crippled man to run a race.

Also, he was frightened for his life. He carried within his body an enemy that might strike him down at any moment. Then, rather pleasantly, he forecast his life in town. He had fought hard, and now he could lay his armour down, and no one would think any the less of him.

And so he sat pondering, thinking first of his children, for whom he had had such high ambitions, then of himself, who would like to live his allotted span, when across the pasture he saw blind Mac coming. It was a hot September afternoon, and he had evidently been to the creek to cool off and to get away from flies. He came steadily along, and though nobody was near his tail was gently wagging.

The rear lot gate had been left open so the cattle could go to pasture, and the dog came through the gate and across the barn lot. This brought him to the fence that separated the lot from the yard, and before this fence he stopped and felt about with his foot, tail still wagging. Tom Jennings did not speak but watched him with queer emotions. [Pg 111]

Having located the fence the blind dog backed off, looked up as if trying to see, started to spring, hesitated, started again, and finally leaped. His front paws hooked over the top plank, and he pulled himself up, remained balanced another moment, then jumped into the yard. It was as neatly done as if he were not blind. Tail still wagging, he came across the yard.

But Martha had forgotten at last: in the middle of the yard was a chicken coop she had recently moved there. Tom started to call out a warning, then for some queer reason did not. Over the unexpected obstacle the dog stumbled and came near falling. He let out no cry. He simply went to the coop, felt it, as if to locate it for the future, then came on toward the house. His head was bowed, though, as if with that shame he seemed always to feel when because of his affliction he happened to have an accident. But his tail was still wagging.

"Mac!" It broke from the man.

The blind dog raised his head and whiffed the air. Then he located his master and came toward him. He laid his head on Tom Jennings's knee, and Tom Jennings laid his big hard hand on the blind dog's head.

"God struck you!" he said hoarsely, "an' you never give up. God put out yo' eyes, and still you do your work. An' you're only a dumb brute, an' I was made in the image of God!" [Pg 112]

The rural telephone in the hall suddenly gave his ring, and he rose and went into the house.

"Yes—I've decided, Tom," he said. "I ain't goin' to sell the farm."

After that there came, perforce, a change in Jennings's method of farming. Years ago Frank had besought him to diversify his crops, to study his soil, to take advantage of the information the agricultural college and the Government were so glad to send.

But to the older Jennings thinking had always been harder than physical toil. Brought up right after the Civil War in a section left poverty-stricken, he could just read and write—that was all; for when he was twelve his service between the plough handles had begun, and there he had served ever since.

Now, from necessity, he began to think and plan. He asked the agricultural college for information, and they sent not only pamphlets but a representative from an experiment station to consult with him and advise him. He sold a bit of land and bought farm machinery. He built a tenant house and installed help. And all the time Frank (who did not know of the leaking heart) also advised him by letters, and when he came home in the summer, helped wonderfully—both by hard work and by mental initiative. [Pg 113]

No great prosperity followed. But Tom Jennings did a shade better than he had done before, and the children stayed at college. Not even Martha knew the extent of what the doctor had told him that day. Only to Mac did he talk freely.

"When yo' eyes was put out, ol' codger, you whetted yo' nose," he would say; "and when my muscles lost their engine power I whetted my ol' rusty brain."

His children all did well at college. Frank finished an academic course (Tom and Martha saw him graduate), then went off to a medical college. Mary, the older girl, was studying library work; the younger girl had come to no conclusion yet. The three of them came home in summer for at least part of the season, and always came at Christmas. They brought with them a different atmosphere—the atmosphere of a wider world. But the girls helped the mother in the kitchen and Frank advised with the father about the farm. There was no feeling of shame on one side, or of apology on the other. It was the kind of thing that has happened on thousands of American farms.

Sometimes at night Tom spoke of his children to Martha: "They are goin' to pass us by, Mother. They are goin' to amount to more than we have."

And then he would go to the window and raise the sash.

[Pg 114]

"Old man?" he would say.

And from the kennel would come a tap-tap that told he was heard.

And Tom continued to hunt with Mac, alone now, for Nell had died of pneumonia. It was a good combination, the man with the damaged heart and the dog with the sightless eyes. Tom had to go slow; so did Mac.

Gradually Tom worked out a series of signals which the dog understood. If there were a ditch ahead Tom would blow once very sharp on his whistle; if the dog was to turn to the right, he would blow twice, to the left, three times. Sometimes, of course, the signals got crossed, and Mac tumbled into a ditch or ran into a tree. Then there would be a choke in Tom's throat. But these things didn't happen often.

It got to be a familiar sight in the community. Men from the Northern Hunt Club, men who attended the field trials on the Earle plantation, came to see the blind dog hunt. Never was such a nose, sportsmen said; never such intelligence and sagacity.

"Shake hands with the gentlemen, Mac," the proud master would say. "They speak well of you."

And the setter would go from one to the other and raise his paw, his head held high after the manner of the blind.

There was never a bright fire in the winter that Mac did not share; never a home-coming of the children that he, as well as Tom, was not at the station to meet them; never a choice bit on the table after Thanksgiving and Christmas but that a portion of it was laid aside for his plate.

[Pg 115]

And so his days and years passed and Mac grew old—not feeble, but a bit slow and a little doting, as old setters become. He would lay his head on Tom's knee and, unless Tom moved or pushed him away, keep it there for hours. The same was true of Martha; sometimes when she was churning he would stay until the butter came. It was as if he knew he didn't have very much longer to abide.

Then Frank Jennings came home, a doctor, with his degree. That was in the fall, just before bird season. Because of the deficiencies of his early education he had had to spend the summer making up certain courses in biology.

He was now a fine, tall, grave young fellow of twenty-eight; even handsome and distinguished. His ambition, he told his father, was to be a surgeon in children's deformities. To this end he hoped to get an appointment as assistant to a certain surgeon, the most famous children's surgeon in the world.

Frank was a quiet fellow; "hoped" was the word he used, but the father knew it was more than hope—it was ardent desire. He thought maybe he had attracted some attention, Frank said, and that his work had reached the ears of the surgeon. If he could get the appointment he felt that his future was secure.

[Pg 116]

"What do you want to be a child's surgeon for?" asked the father. "To make money?"

Frank looked at him quietly and shook his head, and that was all they said.

He left soon after that. Tom drove him to the station, the blind dog sitting in the foot of the buggy.

"Don't you and Mother let your hopes get too high," warned the young man. "There'll be a hundred applicants besides myself. I'll telegraph the result."

A few days afterward bird season opened and Tom Jennings and Mac set off after dinner. There had been three or four days of heavy rains but now the weather had cleared. It was a silent, gorgeous afternoon, high colours everywhere, gold in the sky and in the frosty air.

As he walked along Tom was thinking of his boy and of his girls; for if Mac was growing a bit doting, so, perhaps, was he. Before him old Mac, head high, circled slowly, with ever-wagging tail. Suddenly, not very far from the river, he stopped, and his tail stiffened.

"Comin', ol' boy," said Tom.

The birds rose and the gun barked twice. One bird tumbled dead. The other, only winged, recovered itself and, fluttering across the field, came down near the bank of the river. Mac brought the dead bird, and Tom Jennings, stooping first to pat his head, dropped it in his pocket. Then they went on after the wounded one, which had come down near the river. Even now Tom was thinking in a mooning sort of way of his children.

[Pg 117]

The river made a sharp curve inward near the point where the bird had gone down. Then, forming the remainder of a letter S, it swept out again and around a curve. Below this curve it tumbled over extensive and dangerous shoals of rock. The rains had swollen it. And now the roar from these shoals filled the air.

It was this roar, together with a chance feather that had got into the whistle, that drowned out the frantic signal Tom Jennings tried to give. For ahead of him a terrible thing was about to happen. The wounded bird, frightened at the approach of the dog, rose, fluttered along the ground toward the river, and stopped near the shore. And old Mac, his nose telling him exactly what had occurred, was following with wagging tail and pricked ears—following toward that sharp inward curve of the river, where the banks had caved in and were very steep, and where the current below made a sudden swerve, then swept outward again.

Again, after shaking it, Tom tried to blow his whistle; but the feather had not been dislodged and the roar drowned out the muffled sound.

[Pg 118]

"Mac!" he yelled. "Mac! Come in!"

But the old fellow must not have heard. For Tom, hurrying along, his face crimson, saw the bird rise once more and flutter over the brink—and then, over the same brink, went Mac.

At first, when the man reached the river, he gave a gasp of relief. Mac was swimming smoothly toward the bird which had floated into an eddy. Maybe he would recover it there, and would not get caught in the current.

Only for a moment, though, did the hope last. The bird began to float more and more swiftly, and old Mac to swim more swiftly. Then the current caught them, swept them far out and, with ever-increasing speed, around the curve.

Tom Jennings's heart must have improved during these years of comparative rest. Certainly he forgot that he had one now. By cutting across the bottoms he could reach the next inward bulge of the river, where it tumbled over the shoals. Even as he ran, in the hope that someone would hear, he shouted:

"Help! Help here! Help!"

But the roar of the shoals filled the air, and the lofty, richly foliated trees rose above him as in scorn. Out of breath, he reached the rocks and looked out over the foaming and tumbling waters. Then he made Mac out, way out there. He was trying to crawl up on a rock, like a white seal, and in his mouth he held something.

[Pg 119]

But only his paws caught hold. Then he slipped. Then he was lost from sight, and appeared again, and was lost again. And Tom knew—he was being beaten to death against those rocks.

Below the shoals was a deep pool, with eddies; and here at last Tom, standing on the shore, saw him right himself and come swimming slowly, his head almost submerged, toward the shore.

"Mac!" cried the man. "Here I am! Here I am, Mac!"

He came on, and at last, Tom, lying flat on a rock and reaching down, caught first the back of the neck, then the paws, and pulled him out. As he did so old Mac gave a little cry and, once out, staggered, fell on his side.

Then Tom saw that in his mouth he held the bird and that it was the last bird he would ever retrieve; for it was his own blood, not the bird's, that oozed from his mouth.

He was sitting with the dog's head in his lap when the boy who worked around the railroad station at Breton Junction found him.

"Got a telegram for you," he cried. "I went by the house an' there wasn't anybody at home. I heard you shoot just now and come to find you. Is the dog hurt much?"

"Run to the house," cried Tom. "Tell one of them men to fetch a wagon quick. Tell him to put a mattress and spring on it. Quick, son—quick. Tell 'em they can drive across the fields. Bring 'em yourself."

[Pg 120]

The lad's face went white. He turned and began to run. The wagon came in a short time. Old Mac was lifted and placed on the mattress. By the easiest route they could pick they drove him home. They sent in haste to Breton Junction for a doctor—not a dog doctor but a people's doctor. But one of the rocks against which he had been hurled had driven a rib into old Mac's side. And at eleven o'clock that night, almost at the hour when the hand of God had smitten him, and in the parlour itself, blind Mac, at a call of his name by his master, tapped the floor with his tail for the last time.

It was an hour later that Martha discovered the telegram in the pocket of her husband's hunting coat, which he had thrown over a chair; and there in the presence of the body they opened it and

read:

Got the appointment. Love to you and Mother and old Mac.

(signed) FRANK.

It was Tom Jennings who had the stone put up, where it stands now at the head of the grave, in the edge of the garden. It was Tom who had the words put on—with the help of a sympathetic carver who knew old Mac's story as nearly everybody in the country knew it.

[Pg 121]

TO THE MEMORY OF MAC
A SETTER DOG
WHO, BLIND FROM AN EARLY AGE,
YET DID HIS WORK IN THE WORLD
FAITHFULLY AND CHEERFULLY
THE WORLD IS BETTER BECAUSE HE LIVED.

VI

[Pg 122]

COMET

No puppy ever came into the world under more favourable auspices than Comet. He was descended from a famous line of pointers. Both his father and mother were champions. Before he opened his eyes and while he was crawling about over his brothers and sisters, blind as puppies are at birth, Jim Thompson, Mr. Devant's kennel master, picked him out.

"I believe that's the best 'un in the bunch," he said.

On the day the puppies opened their eyes and first gazed with wonder at this world into which they had been cast, Jim stooped down and snapped his fingers. There was a general scampering back to the protection of the mother by all but one. That was Comet. Even then he toddled toward the smiling man, in a groggy way, wagging his miniature tail.

At the age of one month he pointed a butterfly that lit in the kennel yard.

"Come here, Janie," yelled the delighted Thompson who saw it. "Pointed—the damn little cuss!"

When Jim started taking the growing pups out of the yard and into the fields to the side of Devant's great Southern winter home, Oak Hill, it was Comet who strayed farthest from the man's protecting care. While at sight of a tree stump or a cow or some other monstrous object his brothers and sisters would scamper back to the man, Comet would venture toward it, provided it were not too far, to see what it was. If a cow he would bark, anxious little yelps, to show how brave he was. Then he would turn and run back—but not until he had first barked.

[Pg 123]

Over and over Jim, speaking of him to his wife—they looked after Oak Hill in the summer—would say with conviction:

"He's goin' to make a great dog!"

It looked as if Jim's prophecy would be fulfilled. Comet grew to be handsomer than his brothers and sisters. When Jim taught them to follow when he said "Heel!" to drop when he said "Drop!" and to stand stock still when he said "Ho!" Comet learned more quickly than the others. In everything he was favoured, even in temperament. Now and then he quarrelled with his brothers, who grew jealous of him, and sometimes the quarrel ended in a fight. But the fight over, he never sulked even if he were beaten, but was a loving brother two minutes afterward.

His height he gained quickly, like tall beanpole boys, and though big, his bones were shapely, and the muscles began to stand out on his lank, handsome body. At six months he was a stripling youth, two thirds pup, one third grown dog. Though he still romped with the others, it was plain to the practised eye that he was different. Sometimes he lay in the shade a long time and thoughtfully gazed into the distance, dreaming as serious-minded youths dream the world over. But all Comet's dreams were centred in fields of broomstraw where birds lay hid and in the thrillings his nose told him there.

[Pg 124]

At six months he set his first covey of quail, and though he was trembling with the excited joy of one who knows he has found his life's work, still he remained staunch several minutes. And though when the birds flushed he chased them, he came quickly and obediently back at Jim's command.

Everything—size, contour, nose, muscle, intelligence, spirit—pointed to a great dog. Yes—Comet was one of the favoured of the gods.

One day after the leaves had turned red and brown and the mornings grown chilly and pungent, a crowd of people, strangers to Comet, came to the big house at Oak Hill. With them were automobiles, trunks, horses. All this was tremendously exciting, and with noses pressed against the chicken wire of their yard Comet and his brothers and sisters watched these goings-on.

Then out of the house with Thompson came a big man in tweeds, and the two walked straight to the curious young dogs who were watching them with shining eyes and wagging tails. [Pg 125]

"Well, Thompson," said the big man, "which is the future champion you've been writing me about?"

"Pick him out yourself, sir," said Thompson.

They talked a long time, planning the future of Comet. His yard training was over—Thompson was only yard trainer—and he must be sent to a man experienced in training and handling for field trials. His grade-school days were past. He must go off to college. He must be prepared for the thrilling life of the field-trial dog.

"Larsen's the man to bring him out," said the big man in tweeds, who was George Devant himself. "I saw his dogs work in the Canadian Derbies. I like his methods."

Thompson spoke hesitatingly, as if he disliked to bring the matter up.

"Mr. Devant—you remember, sir, a long time ago Larsen sued us for old Ben, saying the dog was his by rights?"

"Yes, Thompson, I remember—now you speak of it."

"Well, you remember the court decided against him, which was the only thing it could do, for Larsen didn't have any more right to that dog than the Sultan of Turkey. But, Mr. Devant, I was there. I saw Larsen's face, sir, when the case went against him." [Pg 126]

Devant looked keenly at Thompson.

"Another thing, Mr. Devant," Thompson went on, still hesitatingly. "Larsen had a chance to get hold of this breed of pointers. He lost out because he dickered too long and acted cheesy. Now they've turned out to be famous. Some men never forget a thing like that, sir. Larsen's been talking these pointers down ever since. At least, that's what folks tell me. He's staked his reputation on his own breed of dogs. Calls 'em the Larsen strain."

"Go on," said Devant.

"I know Larsen's a good trainer. But it'll mean a long trip for the young dog. It'll be hard to keep in touch with him, too. Now there's an old trainer lives near here, old Wade Swygert. Used to train dogs in England. He's been out of the game a long time—rheumatism. He wants to get back in. He's all right now. I know he never made a big name, but there never was a straighter man than him. He's had bad luck——"

Devant smiled. "Thompson, I admire your loyalty to your friends, but I don't think much of your judgment. We'll turn some of the other puppies over to Swygert if he wants them, but Comet must have the best. I'll write Larsen to-night. To-morrow, crate Comet and send him off."

Just as no dog ever came into the world under more favourable auspices, so no dog ever had a bigger "send-off" than Comet. Even the ladies in the house came out to exclaim over him, and Marian Devant, pretty, eighteen, and a sportswoman, stooped down, caught his head between her hands, looked into his fine eyes, and wished him "Good luck, old man." In the living room men laughingly drank toasts to his future, and from the high-columned front porch Marian Devant waved him good-bye as he was driven off to the station, a bewildered young dog in a padded crate. [Pg 127]

Two days and two nights he travelled. At noon of the third, at a dreary railroad station in a vast prairie country, he was lifted, crate and all, off the train. A man, tall, lean, pale-eyed, came down the platform toward him.

"Some beauty here, Mr. Larsen," said the station agent.

"Yes," drawled Larsen in a meditative, sanctimonious voice. "Pretty to the eye, but he looks scared—er—timid."

"Of course he's scared!" protested the agent. "So would you be if I was to put you in some kind of whale of a balloon and ship you off to Mars."

The station agent poked his hand through the slats and stroked the young dog's head. Comet was grateful, for everything was strange. He had not whined or complained on the trip—but his heart had pounded fast and he had been homesick and bewildered. [Pg 128]

And everything continued to be strange: the treeless country through which he was driven, a country of vast swells, like a motionless sea; the bald house, the group of huge red barns where he was lifted out and the crate door opened; the dogs, setters and pointers, who crowded about him when he was turned into the kennel yard.

They eyed him with enmity, these dogs; they walked round and round him with stiffened tails; but he stood his ground staunchly for a youngster, returning fierce look for fierce look, growl for growl, until Larsen called him sharply and chained him to his own kennel.

He wagged his tail, eager for friendship, as the man stooped to do so. He pushed his nose against the man's knee, but receiving no word of encouragement, he crawled with dignity into his box. There he lay, panting with the strangeness of it all, and wondering.

"One of George Devant's pointers," drawled Larsen to his assistant. "Pretty to look at but—er—timid about the eyes. I never did think much of that breed."

For days Comet remained chained to the kennel, a stranger in a strange land. A hundred times at the click of the gate announcing Larsen's entrance he sprang to his feet and stared hungrily at the man for the light he was accustomed to see in human eyes. But with just a glance at him, Larsen always turned one or more of the other dogs loose and rode off to train them.

[Pg 129]

This he could not understand. Yet he was not without friends of his own kind. He alone was chained up; and now and then another young dog strolled his way with wagging tail and lay down near by, in that strange bond of sympathy which is not confined to man. At these times Comet's spirit returned; he would want to play, for he was still half puppy. Sometimes he picked up a stick, shook it, and his partner caught the other end. So they tugged and growled in mock ferocity, then lay down and looked at each other curiously.

Had any attention been paid him by Larsen, Comet would have gotten over his homesickness. He was no milksop. He was like an overgrown boy off at college, or in some foreign city, sensitive, not sure of himself or his place in the order of things. Had Larsen gained his confidence, it would all have been different. And as for Larsen, he knew that perfectly well.

One brisk sunny afternoon Larsen entered the yard, came straight to him, and turned him loose. So great was his joy at freedom that he did not see the shrewd light in the man's eyes. In the exuberance of his spirit he ran round and round the yard barking into the faces of his friends. Larsen let him out of the yard, mounted his horse, and commanded him to heel. He obeyed with wagging tail.

[Pg 130]

A mile or two down the road Larsen turned into the fields. Across his saddle was something the young pointer had had no experience with—a gun. That part of his education Thompson had neglected, or at least postponed, for he had not expected that Comet would be sent away so soon. That was where Thompson had made a mistake.

At the command "Hie on!" the young pointer ran eagerly around the horse, looking up into the man's face to be sure he had heard aright. Something he saw there made him momentarily droop his ears and tail. Again there came over him the feeling of strangeness, of homesickness, mingled this time with dismay. Larsen's eyes were slits of blue glass. His mouth was set in a thin line.

Had Comet seen a different expression, had he received a single word of encouragement, there would have been no calamity that day. If he had trusted the man, he would have withstood the shock his nerves were about to receive. But he did not trust this pale man with the strange eyes and the hard-set mouth.

At a second command, though, he galloped swiftly, boldly into the field. Once he turned for direction and Larsen waved him on. Round and round the extensive field he circled, forgetting any feeling of strangeness, every fibre of his being intent on the hunt. Larsen, from his horse, watched with appraising eyes.

[Pg 131]

Suddenly to the young dog's nose came the smell, strong, pungent, compelling, of game birds. He stiffened into an earnest beautiful point. Heretofore, in the little training he had gone through, Thompson had come up behind him, flushed the birds and made him drop. And now Larsen, having quickly dismounted and tied his horse, hurried toward him as Thompson had done—except that in Larsen's hand was the gun.

The old-fashioned black powder of a generation ago makes a loud explosion. It sounds like a cannon compared with the modern smokeless powder used for almost a generation by nearly all hunters. Perhaps it was merely accident that had caused Larsen before he left the house to load his pump gun with black-powder shells.

As for Comet, he only knew that the birds rose with a whirr, and that then, above his head, burst an awful roar, almost splitting his ear drums, shocking every sensitive nerve, filling him with terror such as he had never felt before. Even then in the confusion and horror of the noise he turned to the man, ears ringing, eyes dilated. As for Larsen, he declared afterward, to others and to himself even, that he noticed no nervousness in the dog, that he was intent only on getting several birds for breakfast.

[Pg 132]

Twice, three times, four times the pump gun bellowed its cannon-like roar, piercing the ear drums, shattering the nerves. Comet turned. One more glance backward at a face, pale, exultant. Then the puppy in him conquered. Tail tucked, he ran away from that blasting noise.

There is this in fear, that once man or dog turns, fear increases. Witness the panic of armies, of theatre audiences when the cry of fire is given. Faster and faster from that terror that seemed following him Comet sped. Miles and miles he ran. Now and then, stumbling over briars, he yelped. His tail was tucked, his eyes crazy with fear. Seeing a farmhouse, he made for that. It was noon hour and a group of men loitered about the yard. With the cry "Mad dog!" one ran into the

house for a gun. When he came out the others told him that the dog was under the porch, and must only have had a fit. And under the porch, in fact, was Comet. Pressed against the wall in the comparative darkness, the magnificent pointer with the quivering soul waited, panting, eyes gleaming, horror still ringing in his ears.

Here Larsen found him that afternoon. A boy crawled underneath and dragged him forth. He who had started life favoured of the gods, who that morning had been full of high spirit and pride, who had circled his first field like a champion, was a shrinking, cringing creature, like a homeless cur.

[Pg 133]

The men laughed at the spectacle he made. To many people a gun-shy dog is, in his terror, a sight for mirth. Perhaps he is. Certainly he is as much so as a dog with a can tied to his tail. But some day neither sight will be funny to any human soul.

As for Larsen, he kept repeating in sanctimonious tones that he had never been more astonished in his life, though to tell the truth he had never thought much of this breed of pointers. He was very sorry, he said, very sorry. But any one, peering at him from the bushes as he rode home, a dog with tucked tail at his horse's heels, would have seen a shrewd smile on his face.

And thus it happened that Comet came home in disgrace—a coward expelled from college, not for some youthful prank, but because he was yellow. And he knew he was disgraced. He saw it in the face of the big man Devant, who looked at him in the yard where he had spent his happy puppyhood, then turned away. He knew it because of what he saw in the face of Jim Thompson.

In the house was a long plausible letter, explaining how it had happened. "I did everything I could. I never was as much surprised in my life. The dog is hopeless."

As for the other inhabitants of the big house, their minds were full of the events of the season—de-luxe hunting parties, more society events than hunts; lunches served in the woods by uniformed butlers; launch rides up the river; arriving and departing guests. Only one of them except Devant gave the gun-shy dog a thought. Marian Devant visited him in his disgrace. She stooped before him as she had done on that other and happier day, and caught his head between her hands. But his eyes did not meet hers, for in his dim way he knew he was not now what he had been.

[Pg 134]

"I don't believe he's yellow—inside!" she declared and looked at Thompson.

Thompson shook his head. "I tried him with a gun, Miss Marian. Just showed it to him. He ran into his kennel."

"I'll go get mine. I don't believe he will run again."

But at sight of her small gun it all came back. Again he seemed to hear the explosion that had shattered his nerves. The terror had entered his soul. In spite of her pleading he made for his kennel. Even the girl turned away. And as he lay panting in the shelter of his box he knew that never again would men look at him as they had looked, nor life be sweet to him as it had been.

Then came to Oak Hill an old man to see Thompson. He had been on many seas, had fought in a dozen wars, and had settled at last on a truck farm near by. Somewhere in a life full of adventure and odd jobs he had trained dogs and horses. His face was lined, his hair white, his eyes piercing, blue, and kind. Wade Swygert was his name.

[Pg 135]

"I'll take him if you're goin' to give him away," he said to Thompson.

Give him away—who had been championship hope!

Marian Devant hurried out. She looked into the visitor's face shrewdly, appraisingly.

"Can you cure him?" she demanded.

"I doubt it," was the sturdy answer.

"You will try?"

"I'll try."

"Then you can have him. And if there's any expense——"

"Come, Comet," said the old man.

That night, in a neat, humble house, Comet ate supper placed before him by a stout old woman, who had followed this old man to the ends of the world. That night he slept before their fire. Next day he followed the man all about the place. Several days and nights passed this way, then, while he lay before the fire, old Swygert came in with a gun. At sight of it Comet sprang to his feet. He tried to rush out of the room, but the doors were closed. Finally, he crawled under the bed.

Every night after that Swygert got out the gun, until he crawled under the bed no more. Finally, one day the man fastened the dog to a tree in the yard, then came out with a gun. A sparrow lit in a tree, and he shot it. Comet tried to break the rope. All his panic had returned, but the report

[Pg 136]

had not shattered him as that other did, for the gun was loaded light.

After that, frequently the old man shot a bird in his sight, loading the gun more and more heavily, and each time, after the shot, coming to him, showing him the bird, and speaking to him kindly, gently. But for all that the terror remained in his heart.

One afternoon Marian Devant, a young man with her, rode over on horseback. Swygert met her at the gate.

"I don't know," he said, "whether I'm getting anywhere or not."

"I don't believe he's yellow. Not deep down. Do you?"

"No," said Swygert. "Just his ears, I think. They've been jolted beyond what's common. I don't know how. The spirit is willin', but the ears are weak. I might deefen him. Punch 'em with a knife ___"

"That would be running away!" said the girl.

Swygert looked at her keenly, on his face the approbation of an old man who has seen much.

That night Mrs. Swygert told him she thought he had better give it up. It wasn't worth the time and worry. The dog was just yellow.

Swygert pondered a long time. "When I was a kid," he said at last, "there came up a terrible thunderstorm. It was in South America. I was water boy for a railroad gang, and the storm drove us in a shack. While lightnin' was hittin' all around, one of the grown men told me it always picked out boys with red hair. My hair was red, an' I was little and ignorant. For years I was skeered of lightnin'. I never have quite got over it. But no man ever said I was yellow."

[Pg 137]

Again he was silent for a while. Then he went on: "I don't seem to be makin' much headway, I admit that. I'm lettin' him run away as far as he can. Now I've got to shoot an' make him come toward the gun himself, right while I'm shootin' it."

Next day Comet was tied up and fasted, and the next, until he was gaunt and famished. Then, on the afternoon of the third day, Mrs. Swygert, at her husband's direction, placed before him, within reach of his chain, some raw beefsteak. As he started for it, Swygert shot. He drew back, panting, then, hunger getting the better of him, started again. Again Swygert shot.

After that for days Comet "ate to music," as Swygert expressed it. "Now," he said, "he's got to come toward the gun when he's not even tied up."

Not far from Swygert's house is a small pond, and on one side the banks are perpendicular. Toward this pond the old man, with the gun under his arm and the dog following, went. Here in the silence of the woods, with just the two of them together, was to be a final test.

[Pg 138]

On the shelving bank Swygert picked up a stick and tossed it into the middle of the pond with the command to "fetch." Comet sprang eagerly in and retrieved it. Twice this was repeated. But the third time, as the dog approached the shore, Swygert picked up the gun and fired.

Quickly the dog dropped the stick, then turned and swam toward the other shore. Here, so precipitous were the banks, he could not get a foothold. He turned once more and struck out diagonally across the pond. Swygert met him and fired.

Over and over it happened. Each time, after he fired, the old man stooped down with extended hand and begged him to come on. His face was grim, and though the day was cool sweat stood out on his brow. "You'll face the music," he said, "or you'll drown. Better be dead than called yellow."

The dog was growing weary. His head was barely above water. His efforts to clamber up the opposite bank were feeble, frantic. Yet, each time as he drew near the shore Swygert fired.

He was not using light loads now. He was using the regular load of the bird hunter. Time had passed for temporizing. The sweat was standing out all over his face. The sternness in his eyes was terrible to see, for it was the sternness of a man who is suffering.

[Pg 139]

A dog can swim a long time. The sun dropped over the trees. Still the firing went on, regularly, like a minute gun.

Just before the sun set an exhausted dog staggered toward an old man, almost as exhausted as he. The dog had been too near death and was too faint to care for the gun that was being fired over his head. On and on he came, toward the man, disregarding the noise of the gun. It would not hurt him, that he knew at last. He might have many enemies, but the gun, in the hands of this man, was not one of them. Suddenly old Swygert sank down and took the dripping dog in his arms.

"Old boy," he said, "old boy."

That night Comet lay before the fire, and looked straight into the eyes of a man, as he used to look in the old days.

Next season, Larsen, glancing over his sporting papers, was astonished to see that among promising Derbys the fall trials had called forth was a pointer named Comet. He would have

thought it some other dog than the one who had disappointed him so by turning out gun-shy, in spite of all his efforts to prevent, had it not been for the fact that the entry was booked as Comet; owner, Miss Marian Devant; handler, Wade Swygert.

Next year he was still more astonished to see in the same paper that Comet, handled by Swygert, had won first place in a Western trial, and was prominently spoken of as a National Championship possibility. As for him, he had no young entries to offer, but was staking everything on the National Championship, where he was to enter Larsen's Peerless II.

[Pg 140]

It was strange how things fell out—but things have a habit of turning out strangely in field trials, as well as elsewhere. When Larsen reached Breton Junction where the National Championship was to be run, there on the street, straining at the leash held by old Swygert, whom he used to know, was a seasoned young pointer, with a white body, a brown head, and a brown saddle spot—the same pointer he had seen two years before turn tail and run in that terror a dog never quite overcomes.

But the strangest thing of all happened that night at the drawing, when, according to the slips taken at random from a hat, it was declared that on the following Wednesday, Comet, the pointer, was to run with Peerless II.

It gave Larsen a strange thrill, this announcement.

He left the meeting and went straightway to his room. There for a long time he sat pondering. Next day at a hardware store he bought some black powder and some shells.

The race was to be run next day, and that night in his room he loaded half-a-dozen shells. It would have been a study in faces to watch him as he bent over his work, on his lips a smile. Into the shells he packed all the powder they could stand, all the powder his trusted gun could stand, without bursting. It was a load big enough to kill a bear, to bring down a buffalo. It was a load that would echo and reëcho in the hills.

[Pg 141]

On the morning that Larsen walked out in front of the judges and the field, Peerless II at the leash, old Swygert with Comet at his side, he glanced around at the "field," or spectators. Among them was a handsome young woman and with her, to his amazement, George Devant. He could not help chuckling inside himself as he thought of what would happen that day, for once a gun-shy dog, always a gun-shy dog—that was *his* experience.

As for Comet, he faced the strawfields eagerly, confidently, already a veteran. Long ago fear of the gun had left him, for the most part. There were times, when at a report above his head, he still trembled and the shocked nerves in his ear gave a twinge like that of a bad tooth. But always at the quiet voice of the old man, his god, he grew steady, and remained staunch.

Some disturbing memory did start within him to-day as he glanced at the man with the other dog. It seemed to him as if in another and an evil world he had seen that face. His heart began to pound fast and his tail drooped for a moment. Within an hour it was all to come back to him—the terror, the panic, the agony of that far-away time.

[Pg 142]

He looked up at old Swygert, who was his god, and to whom his soul belonged, though he was booked as the property of Miss Marian Devant. Of the arrangements he could know nothing, being a dog. Old Swygert, having cured him, could not meet the expenses of taking him to field trials. The girl had come to the old man's assistance, an assistance which he had accepted only under condition that the dog should be entered as hers, with himself as handler.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" the judges asked.

"Ready," said Larsen and old Swygert.

And Comet and Peerless II were speeding away across that field, and behind them came handlers and judges and spectators, all mounted.

It was a race people still talk about, and for a reason, for strange things happened that day. At first there was nothing unusual. It was like any other field trial. Comet found birds and Swygert, his handler, flushed them and shot. Comet remained steady. Then Peerless II found a covey and Larsen flushed them and shot. And so for an hour it went.

Then Comet disappeared, and old Swygert, riding hard and looking for him, went out of sight over a hill. But Comet had not gone far. As a matter of fact, he was near by, hidden in some high straw, pointing a covey of birds. One of the spectators spied him, and called the judges' attention to him. Everybody, including Larsen, rode up to him, but still Swygert had not come back.

[Pg 143]

They called him, but the old man was a little deaf. Some of the men rode to the top of the hill but could not see him. In his zeal, he had got a considerable distance away. Meanwhile, here was his dog, pointed.

If any one had looked at Larsen's face he would have seen the exultation there, for now his chance had come—the very chance he had been looking for. It's a courtesy one handler sometimes extends another who is absent from the spot, to go in and flush his dog's birds.

"I'll handle this covey for Mr. Swygert," said Larsen to the judges, his voice smooth and plausible, on his face a smile.

And thus it happened that Comet faced his supreme ordeal without the steadying voice of his

god. He only knew that ahead of him were birds, and that behind him a man was coming through the straw, and that behind the man a crowd of people on horseback were watching him. He had become used to that but when, out of the corner of his eye he saw the face of the advancing man, his soul began to tremble.

"Call your dog in, Mr. Larsen," directed the judge. "Make him backstand."

Only a moment was lost while Peerless, a young dog himself, came running in and at a command from Larsen stopped in his tracks behind Comet, and pointed. Larsen's dogs always obeyed, quickly, mechanically. Without ever gaining their confidence, Larsen had a way of turning them into finished field-trial dogs. They obeyed because they were afraid not to.

[Pg 144]

According to the rules the man handling the dog has to shoot as the birds rise. This is done in order to test the dog's steadiness when a gun is fired over him. No specification is made as to the size of the shotgun to be used. Usually, however, small-gauge guns are carried. The one in Larsen's hands was a twelve-gauge, and consequently large.

All morning he had been using it over his own dog. Nobody had paid any attention to it, because he shot smokeless powder. But now, as he advanced, he reached into the left-hand pocket of his hunting coat, where six shells rattled as he hurried along. Two of these he took out and rammed into the barrels.

As for Comet, still standing rigid, statuesque, he heard, as has been said, the brush of steps through the straw, glimpsed a face, and trembled. But only for a moment. Then he steadied, head high, tail straight out. The birds rose with a whirr—and then was repeated that horror of his youth. Above his ears, ears that would always be tender, broke a great roar. Either because of his excitement, or because of a sudden wave of revenge, or of a determination to make sure of the dog's flight, Larsen had pulled both triggers at once. The combined report shattered through the dog's ear drums, it shivered through his nerves, he sank in agony into the straw.

[Pg 145]

Then the old impulse to flee was upon him, and he sprang to his feet, and looked about wildly. But from somewhere in that crowd behind him came to his tingling ears a voice—clear, ringing, deep, the voice of a woman—a woman he knew—pleading as his master used to plead, calling on him not to run but to stand.

"Steady," it said. "Steady, Comet!"

It called him to himself, it soothed him, it calmed him, and he turned and looked toward the crowd. With the roar of the shotgun the usual order observed in field trials was broken up. All rules seemed to have been suspended. Ordinarily, no one belonging to "the field" is allowed to speak to a dog. Yet the girl had spoken to him. Ordinarily, the spectators must remain in the rear of the judges. Yet one of the judges had himself wheeled his horse about and was galloping off, and Marian Devant had pushed through the crowd and was riding toward the bewildered dog.

He stood staunch where he was, though in his ears was still a throbbing pain, and though all about him was this growing confusion he could not understand. The man he feared was running across the field yonder, in the direction taken by the judge. He was blowing his whistle as he ran. Through the crowd, his face terrible to see, his own master was coming. Both the old man and the girl had dismounted now and were running toward him.

[Pg 146]

"I heard," old Swygert was saying to her. "I heard it! I might 'a' known! I might 'a' known!"

"He stood," she panted, "like a rock—oh, the brave, beautiful thing!"

"Where is that——" Swygert suddenly checked himself and looked around.

A man in the crowd (they had all gathered about now) laughed.

"He's gone after his dog," he said. "Peerless has run away!"

VII

[Pg 147]

THE CRISIS IN 25

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things, both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us
He made and loveth all.

Something was wrong with little Tommy Earle. Consequently, something was wrong with the whole Earle plantation. Frank, the Earle dog—a stately Irish setter, rich in the wisdom and devotion of the nobly bred bird dog—Frank had sensed it yesterday afternoon. The boy had not come out of the house until long after dinner. Then he had strolled off forlornly and in silence toward the garage. His frowsy head had been bowed as if he were studying his own little shadow at his feet. His wide blue eyes—they were exactly on a level with the dog's anxiously inquiring ones—had had in them a suggestion of pain and helplessness, of dependence on things bigger than himself.

He had made no outcry; Tommy was something of a stoic. In fact, he had said nothing at all. But that look had gone straight to the dog's heart. Since hunting season was over he had been self-appointed guardian of this boy. The two had come to understand one another as boys and dogs understand. There was no need of words now. Frank understood; something hurt the boy inside.

[Pg 148]

The young mother had run out, her face anxious, and had taken Tommy in out of the sun. He had not seemed to mind going in, and that would have been enough of itself. Frank had followed them up on the porch; the screen door had slammed in his face. He had strolled off, tail depressed; he had lain down in the shade of the front-walk hedge, his ears pricked toward the big white house with the columned porch. It had remained ominously silent inside. The boy had not come out again. The long June afternoon had passed brooding and vacant, as if it were Sunday and all the people on the plantation had gone to church.

Now another morning was here. But instead of the boy running out to greet it a man in a car was driving up the heavy shaded avenue of oaks that led from the big road. Frank met him as he got out of his car, looked up anxiously into his spectacled face, whiffed the strange-smelling satchel he carried, escorted him gravely up the steps. Steve Earle, the boy's father, the dog's master, shook hands with the man and led him into the house. Again the screen door banged in the dog's face.

Nose pressed against it, he watched the two men go down the wide cool hall and turn into the bedroom. He heard the spectacled man talking in there, then Steve Earle, then Marian Earle, the boy's mother, but not the boy, prick his ears as he would. He sat down on his haunches, panting and whining softly to himself. He lay down, head between his paws, agate-brown eyes deep with worry. Still no sound of the boy. He got up and fumbled at the screen door with his paw, fumbled sternly, all concentration on his task.

[Pg 149]

It was not the first time he had turned the trick. He managed to catch the lower frame with his claw, and, before the door sprang shut, to insert his nose. The rest was easy and he went silently down the hall. He stopped in the bedroom doorway. The boy was the centre of attention: he was sitting on his mother's lap; the spectacled man, satchel at his feet, was leaning forward toward him; Steve Earle stood above them, looking down.

The dog's ears drooped. Usually where the boy was, there was also noise. But this room was very quiet. The shades had been partly pulled; in contrast with the brilliant out of doors it looked dim in here, like late afternoon. The mother was smoothing the boy's hair back from his forehead. There was something helpless in the head leaned against the mother's breast and in the dangling, listless feet.

Frank took a tentative step forward. In winter he was welcomed always to the fire, but in summer they said he brought in flies. Now no one seemed to notice him, though he was a big fellow and red. He took another step into the room, his eyes fastened longingly on the boy's flushed face. Suddenly his long tail began to beat an eager tattoo against the bureau. The boy's eyes had looked straight into his.

[Pg 150]

"F'ank?"

The mother glanced round. "I told Frank he mustn't come into the house, dear."

"Why can't he stay wif me, Mama?"

The voice was complaining, as if Tommy were about to cry, and Tommy seldom cried. Then he seemed to forget, and usually when he wanted anything he kept on till he got it. The dog watched closely while Steve Earle lifted him out of the mother's lap and placed him on the bed. Then he made his way to the foot of the bed and lay down firmly and with an air of quiet finality. He would stay here until this strangeness passed away.

But Earle, following the spectacled man out of the room, stopped in the doorway.

"Come on, Frank!"

He raised his eyes beseechingly to his master's face, then dropped his head between his paws, his bushy tail dragging underneath the bed.

"Come on, old man!"

He got slowly to his feet; he looked regretfully at the sturdy little figure on the bed; he tried to catch the mother's eye—sometimes she interposed in his behalf. A little sullenly he followed the two men out of the house.

[Pg 151]

"That's my advice, Earle," the spectacled man said as he climbed into his car. "They can take better care of him there. The roads are good—you can drive slowly. I wouldn't put it off; I would go right away."

Earle went into the house and the dog strolled through the back yard, past the cabin of Aunt Cindy the cook to the shaded side of the garage. Here under the eaves was a ditch the boy had been digging to take off water. He had worked on it all one rainy morning shortly before, a cool, gusty morning, the last gasp of spring before the present first hot spell of summer. Aunt Cindy had discovered him wet to the skin and made a great fuss about it.

Now the shovel was stuck up where the boy had been forced to leave off and the little wagon,

partly filled with dirt, stood near by, its idle tongue on the ground. Tail wagging, the dog whiffed the shovel, the ditch, the wagon. Then he lay down beside the wagon, and looked off over the hills and bottoms of the plantation quivering in the morning heat.

At the hum of the car out of the garage he sprang up and followed it to the side of the porch. Earle ran up the steps into the house. When he presently returned Marian and Aunt Cindy were with him and he carried the boy in his arms. He laid him gently on the back seat of the car with his mother. They were going to Greenville, the father said. When they came back he could sit on the front seat like a man. Aunt Cindy handed in the valise; just a glimpse the dog got of the little upturned sandals on the back seat, and Earle had closed the door. The car drove slowly off down the avenue, the sunlight that pierced the foliage flashing at intervals on its top. The dog looked up into Aunt Cindy's ample black face. She shook her head and went back into the house.

[Pg 152]

He sat down on his haunches, panting, then swallowing, then panting again. He had never been allowed to follow the car. He watched it turn into the road; the woods hid it from sight. He got to his feet and looked round. A curtain upstairs was waving out in the slight breeze, but from all the windows came no sound. He trotted down the avenue and stopped, nose pointed in the direction in which the car had gone. He galloped to the shining road. Up the hill beyond the creek bottoms he made out the car, crawling slowly. He pricked his ears toward it; his eyes grew stern; where were they taking that boy? A moment he stood hesitating, then bounded off after the car.

Miles away he caught up and galloped softly behind, trying to take advantage of the slight shade it offered. His tongue was hanging out, dust was caked in his eyes, the sun baked down on his heavy red coat, the road flew dizzily underneath. He could not stand this pace much longer on such a day—he could not stand it at all if Earle took a notion to drive as he usually drove. When the car slowed up at a hill he ran round it, looking up into his master's face. The car stopped and Earle leaned over the door, his eyes stern.

[Pg 153]

"Go back home, sir!"

The dog stood his ground, panting like an engine.

The command was repeated.

Dizzy with heat, he sat down, eyes half closed, fangs showing with the contraction of his panting, frothing chops, saliva dripping in the road.

Earle turned round, smiling grimly. "What had we best do, Marian?"

"Mama"—it was the boy's voice—"is it F'ank?"

"Yes, dear; you must lie still now."

"Let him go, Mama."

She spoke quickly: "Take him in, Steve."

It was midday when they reached the city. Sitting upright on the seat beside his master, the dog forgot everything else in the procession of crowding wagons and cars and people—strange sights to his country eyes. He lost all sense of direction when, honking, feeling his way, Earle turned down this street and that, the crowd, the noise, the life ever increasing. Eyes aglow, the dog looked behind at the boy. Tommy was trying to sit up. Everything was all right now.

[Pg 154]

But excitement quickly gave place to apprehension. In front of a long building set up on a terrace, with white porches running across the front, Earle lifted the boy out of the car and Marian got out with the valise. Earle turned half around and under his broad panama hat looked at the dog with masterful eyes.

"You stay there!"

Head hanging over the door of the car, eyes a little resentful, the dog watched Earle bear the helpless boy up those steps shining in the sun, saw a woman in white meet them, take Earle's hat off his head and shade the boy's face, saw the three disappear through the wide door. People were passing, wagons clattering, cars honking; but he kept his eyes fastened on the door. A breath of air brought to his nose from the building a smell unlike any that rises from woods or fields. Nose quivering, he noted it carefully, catalogued in it that strange variety of things his nose told him. He would never forget that smell or its associations.

Earle came out at last—came out alone. They drove home together. Aunt Cindy cooked supper for them. Afterward the dog stayed on the front porch, where Earle smoked one silent pipe after another, then knocked the ashes out on the banisters and went into the house. The dog heard him telephoning; heard the names Marian and Tommy; listened till it was over, then came down the steps and strolled round the house. A thin wisp of new moon, before it set that night, looked mildly down on him curled up in a bundle at the foot of a little wagon out by the garage.

[Pg 155]

Next afternoon before he left Earle chained him to his kennel.

"Guess I better," he apologized.

Aunt Cindy, who had watched the performance, shook her head.

"Dat dawg knows," she declared; "he shorely knows!"

"I should think," said Earle, rising, "the way the boy worries him, he would be glad of a little peace."

"Well, he like grown folks, Mr. Steve, he love to be bothered by chillun. Dis place daid widout dat boy. Lorsy, lorsy!"

Earle drove off in the car and the old woman went into the house. Usually she sang as she waddled about her work—now she was silent. All afternoon the dog lay, nose pointed toward the distant city. He could see across the orchard where one day not long before Tommy had picked up June apples off the ground and put them in a basket, down the hill to the creek bottoms. He could see the creek itself flashing here and there through clumps of trees, the creek where Tommy used to throw sticks for him to fetch. He spent his captivity in dignified resentment.

[Pg 156]

But he quickly forgot his grievance when at dusk he heard the hum of the returning car. He ran as far as he could to meet it, his tail slapping the taut chain. When Earle drove into the yard and turned him loose he ran to the car, he jumped up on the running board; he stared at the empty back seat.

"Nothing doing, old man," said Earle gently as he turned away.

So the strange days passed. Every morning he followed Earle about the plantation; every afternoon he was chained up; every evening he was given his freedom till next day. Things did not mend. Earle grew more silent, his conferences with Aunt Cindy briefer, the worry in his gray eyes deeper. The dog saw it plainer at night than at any other time, when out on the porch Earle lit his pipe; read it unmistakably in the flaring up of the match against the man's face out here in the dark. Then he laid his head on the man's knee and Earle pulled his ear, while up in the blackness of the big oaks crickets rattled and sawed without ceasing.

At last one afternoon from in front of his kennel he watched a heavy thunder cloud gather over the hills and come rumbling toward him. The sky grew black; the orchard trees, the creek bottoms, the distant hills took on strange colours, as if autumn had miraculously come. Out of her cabin hurried Aunt Cindy and toward the garage, her white apron like a flag of truce flapping against the oncoming storm. He watched her put the shovel into the little wagon and pull the wagon into the blacksmith shop. The door creaked loudly as she closed it. Back to her cabin she hurried, leaning against the wind. Tail tucked, the dog crawled deep into his kennel and listened to the roar of the storm.

[Pg 157]

It had passed when Earle drove into the yard and turned him loose. So had the ditch the boy had dug that rainy morning—washed full of sand now, and a stick horse that had leaned idle against the lot fence was blown down prostrate on the ground. Earle didn't want any supper, he told Aunt Cindy as he went into the house. He did not come out on the porch that night, and the dog sought his sleeping place beside the garage. It was meaningless now that the wagon was gone. Restless, lonely, strangely excited, he came back and guardedly manipulated the screen door.

He glanced in the living room. Earle in an easy chair was staring at a shaded lamp while he smoked his pipe. Unobserved, the dog went silently down the hall. As he neared the bedroom door a quick obsession seized him that the boy might be in there. Ears pricked, he stepped quickly in and put his head on the little bed beside the big one. It was empty. He walked round the room, whiffing this object and that; then he lay down at the foot of the bed.

[Pg 158]

Here Earle found him. It would be all right, the man said, looking down on him from his splendid height. Pretty lonely, wasn't it? He sat down and unlaced one shoe: he held it in his hand a long time before he dropped it and unlaced the other. Half undressed, he sat silent, looking steadily into the dog's eyes. Sometimes when they were together this way he talked as if to another man. The bed creaked when he climbed in. Out of doors raindrops from the late storm dripped from the trees. Somewhere over the hills a hound was baying dismally. Frank curled up and slept.

He was awakened by the violent ringing of the telephone bell out in the hall. He was on his feet when Earle sprang out of bed and hurried barefoot to it. Even after the man started talking, the echo of that alarm bell still sounded in the vacant house, up the broad stairs, into the empty bedrooms above. Earle came back and got into his clothes, his hands as he laced his shoes trembling a bit. He hurried out of the house and jumped into the car. Intent on the slippery road ahead, he did not see the dog's eyes shining wildly in the glare of his lights as he rounded the curve at the foot of the avenue.

Ears erect, Frank stood for a moment staring at the vanishing rear light, then dashed frantically after it. He was in the pride of his strength and endurance. He was the fastest of all bird dogs, the Irish setter. Yet that mad car drew almost as swiftly away as if he were standing still in the road staring idly after it. Every muscle straining, he followed it, until the light melted into the distance. Even then, nose to the ground, he rushed the trail of those familiar wheels. At last, panting and frothing, he stopped. The night was silent. Even the roar had died away—as if it had never been. He looked bewilderedly around at the dusky fields, the foggy stars. But he continued to gallop toward the city.

[Pg 159]

The fingers of the lighted clock above the hospital door pointed to eleven as Earle ran up the steps. The night was warm, the front door open, and he hurried down the dim-lighted corridor. A light shone out of 25, and he stepped quickly in.

It was an open room, with a screened portion projecting out on the porch. In this portion was the

bed. The young doctor standing at the foot glanced at him with a contraction of the muscles about the corners of the mouth. From the bed over which she leaned Marian raised to him eyes that told the story. Opposite Marian the nurse was stroking the little head and chest.

From between the two women came now and then a plaintive, inarticulate murmuring, a tired echo, it seemed, of what must have been going on long before he came. The young doctor stepped quietly to him. The fever had started rising rapidly an hour before, he explained, and the boy had grown delirious. It was the crisis—sooner than they expected.

[Pg 160]

In spite of the pounding of his heart, Steve's low-pitched question sounded matter-of-fact enough.

"What would you say of him?"

The doctor looked the father narrowly and solemnly in the eyes. "He's a very ill child, Mr. Earle."

Steve nodded quickly. "Is there anything I can do?"

The doctor shook his head.

Somewhere a bell rang; a nurse's skirts rustled as she passed the door. Earle sat down, his hat on his knees, staring helplessly.

"F'ank?"

The thin little voice on the bed was shrill and complaining. The women's heads met above it.

"Mother's here. Mother's here, darling."

"A playmate?" asked the doctor.

Earle shook his head. "No; a dog."

"F'ank?"

Earle got up, went out of the room, down the corridor, out on the porch. He sank on a bench and buried his face in his hands.

"God!" he whispered, "I can't stand that!"

When he came back, for he could not stay away, Marian met him in the middle of the room, her flushed face and dilated eyes raised to his.

[Pg 161]

"Steve—he's growing excited. He's wearing himself out. Go for Frank!"

Earle looked beyond her at the bed. The cheeks were crimson, the eyes half closed; through the narrowed slits they burned upward like fire. Earle turned to the doctor.

"What about it?"

"How long will it take, Mr. Earle?"

"Two hours."

"Yes—I should go—right away!"

Earle crossed the room to the nurse sitting beside the bed. "It won't matter?" he asked. "It won't excite him?"

She shook her head.

He sank on his knees beside the bed, his big arm braced over the heaving little chest, his eyes drinking in the light in those narrowed unseeing ones.

The lips were incredibly hot.

"Old scout!" he choked in the little ear.

He did not look at the faces as he hurried out of the room, nor back at the building when he jumped into his car. He roared through the city, into the silent country. He glimpsed the stone mileposts flash past. He glanced now and then at the clock in the front of the car. He had set an almost impossible time. But he was halfway home at midnight. As he rounded a sharp curve his lights flashed on something far ahead in the road—a hog or perhaps a prowling dog. It sprang aside into the bushes. He passed the spot with a roar.

[Pg 162]

Behind him Frank leaped back into the road, and stood for a moment staring after the car. He had gotten a glimpse, a whiff—he had thought he knew it. But that car was going the wrong way. He must have been mistaken. Warily he turned and galloped on toward the city.

He had come many miles. He had many miles yet to go. From sleeping farmhouses dogs bayed him as he passed, running like a big fox, silent and swift. The road turned and twisted among hills and small mountains. Ahead in the sky was a glow unlike the glow of coming day. It grew brighter with the passing miles. It drew him on. The distance would have meant little to him, except for the tremendous speed at which he had been travelling. Now his chest was flecked with foam. His tail, carried usually so proudly, followed the curve of his haunches. His overstrained muscles worked mechanically like pistons. His heart pounded his long, lean red ribs.

Dizzy, almost famished, he came at last to the top of a hill and stopped, ears erect. Below him stretched rows of twinkling lights that, all together, made up the glow in the sky. That was the city with the strange building into which they had carried Tommy Earle!

He could afford to rest, now that he was so near. To the side of the road grew bushes to which coolness and moisture clung. Sides heaving, he scraped his back against them, his heavy tail wagging with inward satisfaction, the glow from those distant lights reflected dimly in his eyes. Then he sank down on his stomach, panting out loud in the sultry stillness.

[Pg 163]

A roar, a blinding glare were upon him before he sprang wildly to his feet. The wind rushed past as the car flashed by. He glimpsed Earle's tense face.

Again he dashed after the rear light—again it drew away from him. He left the road again—just behind the car. Once more it was leaving him. In his desperation he began to bark as he ran. Above the roar his frantic, enraged yelps pierced the night. He heard the crunching of brakes.

"Frank!" cried the man.

The door was flung open. He jumped in and up on the padded seat. The car swished smoothly and swiftly over black, moist, oily streets, past interminable lights. Every muscle of the dog began to quiver. He looked with shining eyes into his master's face, choked, and swallowed.

Suddenly he rose on the seat, feet together. Down the street had come the smell, unlike any that rises from woods or fields, the smell he would never forget. It drew closer. The car turned in toward the curb. Earle spoke quickly. But the dog had leaped over the door of the car and landed in the middle of the sidewalk. He took the steps three at a time. Down the dim, silent corridor floated the pungent smell. Earle was at his side, had caught him by the mane, had opened the door, was holding him back.

[Pg 164]

"Steady, old man!" he said. "Steady!"

They hurried together down the shining hall. They turned into a strange room. Over there, lips parted, his mistress had sprung to her feet. There were others in here—a man, a woman in white—but he hardly saw them. For on white sheets, face upturned and crimson, eyes half closed, lay little Tommy Earle.

The mother was on her knees now, leaning far over the boy. Her face was flushed like his face. She was smiling down eagerly into the strange, up-turning eyes. "Look!" she was pleading. "Look at Mother, darling. Be quiet—listen! Here's Frank—come to see you!"

She caught the dog convulsively to her, so close he could feel the pounding of her heart. "Help me, Steve!" she panted.

She picked the boy's hand up and placed it on the shaggy head. She pressed the little fingers together. She slipped her arm under the pillow and turned the burning face toward the dog. "Now!" she smiled. "You see him, don't you, dear! Mother told you he would come, didn't she? Mother told you— Ah!" she gasped.

Long after the boy had gazed in recognition into the deep, longing eyes of the dog, then with a wistful little smile up into the mother's face; long after his eyes had closed in that profound sleep which marks the breaking up of delirium and fever, Frank sat on his haunches beside the bed, his patient head on the covers.

[Pg 165]

He licked the hand of the boy, then glanced up inquiringly into the face of the mother who sat beside him. She shook her head and he licked it no more.

Later she whispered to him that he could lie down now, and nodded at the floor at her feet. He understood, but he did not move.

The muscles of his haunches were cruelly cramped when the nurse snapped off the light. In the pale light growing luminous and pink and gradually suffusing the room Tommy Earle opened his eyes. First they looked up into the happy face of the mother, then at Steve Earle standing at the foot of the bed, then straight and clear into the faithful eyes of his friend.

The cramped muscles quivered and jerked, the long tail beat the floor. He wanted to leap on the bed, to rush round the room. The mother caught him by the mane. He must be still, she said.

The voice of Tommy Earle when he spoke was as gentle and clear as the chirp of half-awakened birds out of the window.

"F'ank?" he said.

[Pg 166]

Steve Earle had to hold the dog now—had to drag him away from the bed. They brought him a pan of water. They made him lie down. They came softly in, nurses and internes, and looked at him. He lay beside the bed, relaxed now, but panting slightly, his eyes still aglow. They said it was a wonderful thing he had done. And one of them, she was young and radiant, gazed long and steadily, as if fascinated, into his gentle, brave eyes, upraised to hers.

"He knows what he's done!" she said.

THE TRIAL IN TOM BELCHER'S STORE

It was a plain case of affinity between Davy Allen and Old Man Thornycroft's hound dog Buck. Davy, hurrying home along the country road one cold winter afternoon, his mind intent on finishing his chores before dark, looked back after passing Old Man Thornycroft's house to find Buck trying to follow him—*trying* to, because the old man, who hated to see anybody or anything but himself have his way, had chained a heavy block to him to keep him from doing what nature had intended him to do—roam the woods and poke his long nose in every briar patch after rabbits.

At the sight Davy stopped, and the dog came on, dragging behind him in the road the block of wood fastened by a chain to his collar and trying at the same time to wag his tail. He was tan-coloured, lean as a rail, long-eared, a hound every inch; and Davy was a ragged country boy who lived alone with his mother, and who had an old single-barrel shotgun at home, and who had in his grave boy's eyes a look, clear and unmistakable, of woods and fields.

To say it was love at first sight when that hound, dragging his prison around with him, looked up into the boy's face, and when that ragged boy who loved the woods and had a gun at home looked down into the hound's eyes, would hardly be putting it strong enough. It was more than love—it was perfect understanding, perfect comprehension. "I'm your dog," said the hound's upraised, melancholy eyes. "I'll jump rabbits and bring them around for you to shoot. I'll make the frosty hills echo with music for you. I'll follow you everywhere you go. I'm your dog if you want me—yours to the end of my days."

[Pg 168]

And Davy, looking down into those upraised, beseeching eyes, and at that heavy block of wood, and at the raw place the collar had worn on the neck, then at Old Man Thornycroft's bleak, unpainted house on the hill, with the unhomelike yard and the tumble-down fences, felt a great pity, the pity of the free for the imprisoned, and a great longing to own, not a dog, but *this* dog.

"Want to come along?" he grinned.

The hound sat down on his haunches, elevated his long nose, and poured out to the cold winter sky the passion and longing of his soul. Davy understood, shook his head, looked once more into the pleading eyes, then at the bleak house from which this prisoner had dragged himself.

"That ol' devil!" he said. "He ain't fitten to own a dog. Oh, I wish he was mine!"

A moment he hesitated there in the road, then he turned and hurried away from temptation.

[Pg 169]

"He *ain't* mine," he muttered. "Oh, dammit all!"

But temptation followed him as it has followed many a boy and man. A little way down the road was a pasture through which by a footpath he could cut off half a mile of the three miles that lay between him and home. Poised on top of the high rail fence that bordered the road, he looked back. The hound was still trying to follow, walking straddle-legged, head down, all entangled with the taut chain that dragged the heavy block. The boy watched the frantic efforts, pity and longing on his face, then he jumped off the fence inside the pasture and hurried on down the hill, face set straight ahead.

He had entered a pine thicket when he heard behind the frantic, choking yelps of a dog in dire distress. Knowing what had happened, he ran back. Within the pasture the hound, only his hind feet touching the ground, was struggling and pawing at the fence. He had jumped, the block had caught and was hanging him. Davy rushed to him. Breathing fast, he unsnapped the chain. The block and chain fell on the other side of the fence and the dog was free. Shrewdly the boy looked back up the road; the woods hid the old man's house from view and no one was to be seen. With a little grin of triumph he turned and broke into a run down the pasture hill toward the pines, the wind blowing gloriously into his face, the dog galloping beside him.

[Pg 170]

Still running, the two came out into the road that led home, and suddenly Davy stopped short and his face flushed. Yonder around the bend on his gray mare jogged Squire Kirby toward them, his pipe in his mouth, his white beard stuck cozily inside the bosom of his big overcoat. There was no use to run, no use to try to make the dog hide, no use to try to hide himself—the old man had seen them both. Suppose he knew whose dog this was! Heart pounding, Davy waited beside the road.

Mr. Kirby drew rein opposite them and looked down with eyes that twinkled under his bushy white brows. He always stopped to ask the boy how his mother was and how they were getting along. Davy had been to his house many a time with eggs and chickens to sell, or with a load of seasoned oak wood. Many a time he had warmed himself before Mr. Kirby's fire in the big living room and bedroom combined, and eaten Mrs. Kirby's fine white cake covered with frosting. Never before had he felt ill at ease in the presence of the kindly old man.

"That's a genuine hound you got there, son, ain't it?"

"Yes, sir," said Davy.

"Good for rabbits an' 'possums an' coons, eh?"

"He shore is!"

"Well, next big fat 'possum you an' him ketch, you bring that 'possum 'round an' me an' you'll talk business. Maybe we'll strike a bargain. Got any good sweet potatoes? Well, you bring four or five bushels along to eat that 'possum with. Haulin' any wood these days? Bring me a load or two of good, dry oak—pick it out, son, hear? How's your ma? All right? That's good. Here——" [Pg 171]

He reached deep down in a pocket of his enormous faded overcoat, brought out two red apples, and leaned down out of his saddle which creaked under the strain of his weight.

"Try one of 'em yourself an' take one of 'em home to your ma. Git up, Mag!"

He jogged on down the road, and the boy, sobered, walked on. One thing was certain, though, Mr. Kirby hadn't known whose dog this was. What difference did it make, anyhow? He hadn't stolen anything. He couldn't let a dog choke to death before his eyes. What did Old Man Thornycroft care about a dog, anyhow, the hard-hearted old skinflint!

He remembered the trouble his mother had had when his father died and Old Man Thornycroft pushed her for a note he had given. He had heard people talk about it at the time, and he remembered how white his mother's face had been. Old Man Thornycroft had refused to wait, and his mother had had to sell five acres of the best land on the little farm to pay the note. It was after the sale that Mr. Kirby, who lived five miles away, had ridden over. [Pg 172]

"Why didn't you let me know, Mrs. Allen?" he had demanded. "Or Steve Earle? Either one of us would have loaned you the money—gladly, gladly!" He had risen from the fire and pulled on the same overcoat he wore now. It was faded then, and that was two years ago.

It was sunset when Davy reached home to find his mother out in the clean-swept yard picking up chips in her apron. From the bedroom window of the little one-storied unpainted house came a bright red glow, and from the kitchen the smell of cooking meat. His mother straightened up from her task with a smile when with his new-found partner he entered the yard.

"Why, Davy," she asked, "where did you get him?"

"He—he just followed me, Ma."

"But whose dog is he?"

"He's mine, Ma—he just took up with me."

"Where, Davy?"

"Oh, way back down the road—in a pasture."

"He must belong to somebody."

"He's just a ol' hound dog, Ma, that's all he is. Lots of hounds don't belong to nobody—everybody knows that, Ma. Look at him, Ma. Mighty nigh starved to death. Lemme keep him. We can feed him on scraps. He can sleep under the house. Me an' him will keep you in rabbits. You won't have to kill no more chickens. Nobody don't want him but me!" [Pg 173]

From her gaunt height she looked down into the boy's eager eyes, then at the dog beside him. "All right, son," she said. "If he don't belong to anybody."

That night Davy alternately whistled and talked to the dog beside him as he husked the corn he had raised with his own hands, and chopped the wood he had cut and hauled—for since his father's death he had kept things going. He ate supper in a sort of haze; he hurried out with a tin plate of scraps; he fed the grateful, hungry dog on the kitchen steps. He begged some vaseline from his mother and rubbed it on the sore neck. Then he got two or three empty gunnysacks out of the corncrib, crawled under the house to a warm place beside the chimney, and spread them out for a bed. He went into the house whistling; he didn't hear a word of the chapter his mother read out of the Bible. Before he went to bed in the shed-room he raised the window.

"You all right, old feller?" he called.

Underneath the house he heard the responsive tap-tap of a tail in the dry dust. He climbed out of his clothes, leaving them in a pile in the middle of the floor, tumbled into bed, and pulled the covers high over him.

"Golly!" he said. "Oh, golly!" [Pg 174]

Next day he hunted till sundown. The Christmas holidays were on and there was no thought of school. He went only now and then, anyway, for since his father's death there was too much for him to do at home. He hunted in the opposite direction from Old Man Thornycroft's. It was three miles away; barriers of woods and bottoms and hills lay between, and the old man seldom stirred beyond the boundaries of his own farm; but Davy wanted to be on the safe side.

There were moments, though, when he thought of the old man and wondered if he had missed the dog and whether he would make any search for him. There were sober moments, too, when he thought of his mother and Mr. Kirby and wished he had told them the truth. But then the long-drawn bay of the hound would come from the bottoms ahead, and he would hurry to the summons, his face flushed and eager. The music of the dog running, the sound of the shots, and his own triumphant yells started many an echo among the silent, frosted hills that day. He came

home with enough meat to last a week—six rabbits. As he hurried into the yard he held them up for the inspection of his mother, who was feeding the chickens.

"He's the finest rabbit dog ever was, Ma! Oh, golly, he can follow a trail! I never see anything like it, Ma. I never did! I'll skin 'em an' clean 'em after supper. You ought to have saw him, Ma! Golly!" [Pg 175]

And while he chopped the wood, and milked the cow, and fed the mule, and skinned the rabbits, he saw other days ahead like this, and whistled and sang and talked to the hound, who followed close at his heels every step he took.

Then one afternoon, while he was patching the lot fence, with Buck sunning himself near the woodpile, came Old Man Thornycroft. Davy recognized his buggy as it turned the bend in the road. He quickly dropped his tools, called Buck to him, and got behind the house where he could see without being seen. The buggy stopped in the road, and the old man, his hard, pinched face working, his buggy whip in his hand, came down the walk and called Mrs. Allen out on the porch.

"I just come to tell you," he cried, "that your boy Davy run off with my dog las' Friday evenin'! There ain't no use to deny it. I know all about it. I seen him when he passed in front of the house. I found the block I had chained to the dog beside the road. I heered Squire Jim Kirby talkin' to some men in Tom Belcher's sto' this very mornin'; just happened to overhear him as I come in. 'A boy an' a dog,' he says, 'is the happiest combination in nater.' Then he went on to tell about your boy an' a tan dog. He had met 'em in the road. Met 'em when? Last Friday evenin'. Oh, there ain't no use to deny it, Mrs. Allen! Your boy Davy—he *stole* my dog!" [Pg 176]

"Mr. Thornycroft"—Davy could not see his mother, but he could hear her voice tremble—"he did *not* know whose dog it was!"

"He didn't? He didn't?" yelled the old man. "An' him a boy that knows ever' dog for ten miles around! Right in front of my house, I tell you—that's where he picked him up—that's where he tolled him off! Didn't I tell you, woman, I seen him pass? Didn't I tell you I found the block down the road? Didn't know whose dog it was? Ridiculous, ridiculous! Call him, ask him, face him with it. Likely he'll lie—but you'll see his face. Call him, that's all I ask. Call him!"

"Davy!" called Mrs. Allen. "Davy!"

Just a moment the boy hesitated. Then he went around the house. The hound stuck very close to him, eyes full of terror, tail tucked as he looked at the old man.

"There he is—with *my dog*!" cried the old man. "You didn't know whose dog it was, did you, son? Eh? You didn't know, now, did you?"

"Yes!" cried the boy. "I knowed!"

"Hear that, Mrs. Allen? Did he know? What do you say now? He stole my dog, didn't he? That's what he done, didn't he? Answer me, woman! You come here!" he yelled, his face livid, and started, whip raised, toward boy and dog.

There were some smooth white stones the size of hen eggs arranged around a flower bed in the yard, and Davy stood near these stones—and now, quick as a flash, he stooped down and picked one up. [Pg 177]

"You stop!" he panted, his face very white.

His mother cried out and came running toward him, but Thornycroft had stopped. No man in his right mind wants to advance on a country boy with a rock. Goliath tried it once.

"All right!" screamed the old man. "You steal first—then you try to assault an old man! I didn't come here to raise no row. I just come here to warn you, Mrs. Allen. I'll have the law on that boy—I'll have the law on him before another sun sets!"

He turned and hurried toward the buggy. Davy dropped the rock. Mrs. Allen stood looking at the old miser, who was clambering into his buggy, with a sort of horror. Then she ran toward the boy.

"Oh, Davy! run after him. Take the dog to him. He's terrible, Davy, terrible! Run after him—anything—anything!"

But the boy looked up at her with grim mouth and hard eyes.

"I ain't a-goin' to do it, Ma!" he said.

It was after supper that very night that the summons came. Bob Kelley, rural policeman, brought it.

"Me an' Squire Kirby went to Greenville this mornin'," he said, "to look up some things about court in the mornin'. This evenin' we run into Old Man Thornycroft on the street, lookin' for us. He was awful excited. He had been to Mr. Kirby's house, an' found out Mr. Kirby was in town, an' followed us. He wanted a warrant swore out right there. Mr. Kirby tried to argue with him, but it warn't no use. So at last Mr. Kirby turned to me. 'You go on back, Bob,' he said. 'This'll give me some more lookin' up to do. Tell my wife I'll just spend the night with Judge Fowler, an' git back in time for court in Belcher's sto' in the mornin'. An', Bob, you just stop by Mrs. Allen's—she's guardian of the boy—an' tell her I say to bring him to Belcher's sto' to-morrow mornin' at nine. [Pg 178]

You be there, too, Mr. Thornycroft—an', by the way, bring that block of wood you been talkin' about."

That was all the squire had said, declared the rural policeman. No, he hadn't sent any other message—just said he would read up on the case. The rural policeman went out and closed the door behind him. It had been informal, haphazard, like the life of the community in which they lived. But, for all that, the law had knocked at the door of the Widow Allen and left a white-faced mother and a bewildered boy behind.

They tried to resume their usual employments. Mrs. Allen sat down beside the table, picked up her sewing and put her glasses on, but her hands trembled when she tried to thread the needle. Davy sat on a split-bottom chair in the corner, his feet up on the rungs, and tried to be still; but his heart was pounding fast and there was a lump in his throat. Presently he got up and went out of doors, to get in some kindling on the back porch before it snowed, he told his mother. But he went because he couldn't sit there any longer, because he was about to explode with rage and grief and fear and bitterness.

[Pg 179]

He did not go toward the woodpile—what difference did dry kindling make now? At the side of the house he stooped down and softly called Buck. The hound came to him, wriggling along under the beams, and he leaned against the house and lovingly pulled the briar-torn ears. A long time he stayed there, feeling on his face already the fine mist of snow. To-morrow the ground would be white; it didn't snow often in that country; day after to-morrow everybody would hunt rabbits—everybody but him and Buck.

It was snowing hard when at last he went back into the warm room, so warm that he pulled off his coat. Once more he tried to sit still in the split-bottom chair. But there is no rage that consumes like the rage of a boy. In its presence he is so helpless! If he were a man, thought Davy, he would go to Old Man Thornycroft's house this night, call him out, and thrash him in the road. If he were a man, he would curse, he would do something. He looked wildly about the room, the hopelessness of it all coming over him in a wave. Then suddenly, because he wasn't a man, because he couldn't do what he wanted to do, he began to cry, not as a boy cries, but more as a man cries, in shame and bitterness, his shoulders shaken by great convulsive sobs, his head buried in his hands, his fingers running through his tangled mop of hair.

[Pg 180]

"Davy, Davy!" The sewing and the scissors slipped to the floor. His mother was down on her knees beside him, one arm about his shoulders, trying to look into his eyes. "You're my man, Davy! You're the only man, the only help I've got. You're my life, Davy. Poor boy! Poor child!"

He caught hold of her convulsively, and she pressed his head against her breast. Then he saw that she was crying, and he grew quiet, and wiped his eyes with his ragged sleeve.

"I'm all right now, Ma," he said; but he looked at her wildly.

She did not follow him into his little unceiled bedroom. She must have known that he had reached that age where no woman could help him. It must be a man now to whom he could pin his faith. And while he lay awake, tumbling and tossing, along with bitter thoughts of Old Man Thornycroft came other bitter thoughts of Mr. Kirby, whom, deep down in his boy's heart, he had worshipped—Mr. Kirby, who had sided with Old Man Thornycroft and sent a summons with—no message for him. "God!" he said. "God!" And pulled his hair, down there under the covers; and he hated the law that would take a dog from him and give it back to that old man—the law that Mr. Kirby represented.

[Pg 181]

It was still snowing when next morning he and his mother drove out of the yard and he turned the head of the reluctant old mule in the direction of Belcher's store. A bitter wind cut their faces, but it was not as bitter as the heart of the boy. Only twice on that five-mile ride did he speak. The first time was when he looked back to find Buck, whom they had left at home, thinking he would stay under the house on such a day, following very close behind the buggy.

"Might as well let him come on," said the boy.

The second time was when they came in sight of Belcher's store, dim yonder through the swirling snow. Then he looked up into his mother's face.

"Ma," he said grimly, "I ain't no thief!"

She smiled as bravely as she could with her stiffened face and with the tears so near the surface. She told him that she knew it, and that everybody knew it. But there was no answering smile on the boy's set face.

The squire's gray mare, standing huddled up in the midst of other horses and of buggies under the shed near the store, told that court had probably already convened. Hands numb, the boy hitched the old mule to the only rack left under the shed, then made Buck lie down under the buggy. Heart pounding, he went up on the store porch with his mother and pushed the door open.

[Pg 182]

There was a commotion when they entered. The men, standing about the pot-bellied stove, their overcoats steaming, made way for them. Old Man Thornycroft looked quickly and triumphantly around. In the rear of the store the squire rose from a table, in front of which was a cleared space.

"Pull up a chair nigh the stove for Mrs. Allen, Tom Belcher," he said. "I'm busy tryin' this chicken-stealin' nigger. When I get through, Mrs. Allen, if you're ready, I'll call your case."

Davy stood beside his mother while the trial of the Negro proceeded. Some of the fight had left him now, crowded down here among all these grown men, and especially in the presence of Mr. Kirby, for it is hard for a boy to be bitter long. But with growing anxiety he heard the sharp questions the magistrate asked the Negro; he saw the frown of justice; he heard the sentence—"sixty days on the gang." And the Negro had stolen only a chicken—and he had run off with another man's dog.

"The old man's rough this mornin'," Jim Taylor whispered to another man above him; and he saw the furtive grin on the face of Old Man Thornycroft, who leaned against the counter, waiting.

His heart jumped into his mouth when after a silence the magistrate spoke: "Mr. Thornycroft, step forward, sir. Put your hand on the book here. Now tell us about that dog of yours that was stole." [Pg 183]

Looking first at the magistrate, then at the crowd as if to impress them also, the old man told in a high-pitched, excited voice all the details—his seeing Davy Allen pass in front of his house last Friday afternoon, his missing the dog, his finding the block of wood down the road beside the pasture fence, his overhearing the squire's talk right here in the store, his calling on Mrs. Allen, the boy's threatening him.

"I tell you," he cried, "that's a dangerous character—that boy!"

"Is that all you've got to say?" asked the squire.

"It's enough, ain't it?" demanded Thornycroft angrily.

The squire nodded and spat into the cuspidor between his feet. "I think so," he said quietly. "Stand aside. Davy Allen, step forward. Put your hand on the book here, son. Davy, how old are you?"

The boy gulped. "Thirteen year old, goin' on fo'teen."

"You're old enough, son, to know the nater of the oath you're about to take. For over two years you've been the main-stay an' support of your mother. You've had to carry the burdens and responsibilities of a man, Davy. The testimony you give in this case will be the truth, the whole truth, an' nothin' but the truth, so help you God. What about it?" [Pg 184]

Davy nodded, his face very white.

"All right now. Tell us about it. Talk loud so we can hear—all of us."

The boy's eyes never left Mr. Kirby's while he talked. Something in them held him, fascinated him, overawed him. Very large and imposing he looked there behind his little table, with his faded old overcoat on, and there was no sound in the room but the boy's clear voice.

"An' you come off an' left the dog at first?"

"Yes, sir."

"An' you didn't unfasten the chain from the block till the dog got caught in the fence?"

"No, sir, I didn't."

"Did you try to get him to follow you then?"

"No, sir, he wanted to."

"Ask him, Mr. Kirby," broke in Thornycroft angrily, "if he tried to drive him home!"

"I'll ask him whatever seems fit an' right to me, sir," said Mr. Kirby. "What did you tell your ma, Davy, when you got home?"

"I told her he followed me."

"Did you tell her whose dog he was?"

"No, sir."

"Ain't that what you ought to have done? Ain't it?"

Davy hesitated. "Yes, sir." [Pg 185]

There was a slight shuffling movement among the men crowded about. Somebody cleared his throat. Mr. Kirby resumed:

"This block you been tellin' about—how was it fastened to the dog?"

"There was a chain fastened to the block by a staple. The other end was fastened to the collar."

"How heavy do you think that block was?"

"About ten pound, I reckon."

"Five," broke in Old Man Thornycroft with a sneer.

Mr. Kirby turned to him. "You fetched it with you, didn't you? I told you to. It's evidence. Bob Kelley, go out to Mr. Thornycroft's buggy an' bring that block of wood into court."

The room was silent while the rural policeman was gone. Davy still stood in the cleared space before Mr. Kirby, his ragged overcoat on, his tattered hat in his hand, breathing fast, afraid to look at his mother. Everybody turned when Kelley came in with the block of wood. Everybody craned their necks to watch while, at the magistrate's order, Kelley weighed the block of wood on the store scales, which he put on the magistrate's table.

"Fo'teen punds," said Mr. Kirby. "Take the scales away."

"It had rubbed all the skin off'n the dog's neck," broke in Davy impulsively. "It was all raw an' bleedin'." [Pg 186]

"Aw, that ain't so!" cried Thornycroft.

"Is the dog out there?" asked Mr. Kirby.

"Yes, sir, under the buggy."

"Bob Kelley, you go out an' bring that dog into court."

The rural policeman went out, and came back with the hound, who looked eagerly up from one face to the other, then, seeing Davy, came to him and stood against him, still looking around with that expression of melancholy on his face that a hound dog always wears except when he is in action.

"Bring the dog here, son!" commanded Mr. Kirby. He examined the raw place on the neck. "Any of you gentlemen care to take a look?" he asked.

"It was worse'n that," declared Davy, "till I rubbed vase-leen on it."

Old Man Thornycroft pushed forward, face quivering. "What's all this got to do with that boy stealin' that dog?" he demanded. "That's what I want to know—what's it got to do?"

"Mr. Thornycroft," said Kirby, "at nine o'clock this mornin' this place ceased to be Tom Belcher's sto', an' become a court of justice. Some things are seemly in a court, some not. You stand back there!"

The old man stepped back to the counter, and stood pulling his chin, his eyes running over the crowd of faces. [Pg 187]

"Davy Allen," spoke Mr. Kirby, "you stand back there with your ma. Tom Belcher, make way for him. And, Tom, s'pose you put another stick of wood in that stove an' poke up the fire." He took off his glasses, blew on them, polished them with his handkerchief and readjusted them. Then, leaning back in his chair, he spoke.

"Gentlemen, from the beginnin' of time, as fur back as records go, a dog's been the friend, companion, an' protector of man. Folks say he come from the wolf, but that ain't no reflection on him, seein' that we come from monkeys ourselves; an' I believe, takin' all things into account, I'd as soon have a wolf for a ancestor as a monkey, an' a little ruther.

"Last night in the liberry of my old friend Judge Fowler in Greenville, I looked up some things about this dog question. I find that there have been some queer decisions handed down by the courts, showin' that the law does recognize the fact that a dog is different from other four-footed critters. For instance, it has been held that a dog has a right to protect not only his life but his dignity; that where a man worries a dog beyond what would be reasonable to expect any self-respectin' critter to stand, that dog has a right to bite that man, an' that man can't collect any damages—provided the bitin' is done at the time of the worryin' an' in sudden heat an' passion. That has been held in the courts, gentlemen. The law that holds for man holds for dogs. [Pg 188]

"Another thing: If the engineer of a railroad train sees a cow or a horse or a sheep on the track, or a hog, he must stop the train or the road is liable for any damage done 'em. But if he sees a man walkin' along the track, he has a right to presume that the man, bein' a critter of more or less intelligence, will git off, an' he is not called on to stop under ordinary circumstances. The same thing holds true of a dog. The engineer has a right to presume that the dog, bein' a critter of intelligence, will get off the track. Here again the law is the same for dog an' man.

"*But*—if the engineer has reason to believe that the man's mind is took up with some object of an engrossin' nater, he is supposed to stop the train till the man comes to himself an' looks around. The same thing holds true of a dog. If the engineer has reason to suspect that the dog's mind is occupied with some engrossin' topic, he must stop the train. That case has been tested in this very state, where a dog was on the track settin' a covey of birds in the adjoinin' field. The railroad was held responsible for the death of that dog, because the engineer ought to have known by the action of the dog that his mind was on somethin' else beside railroad trains an' locomotives."

Again the magistrate spat into the cuspidor between his feet. Davy, still watching him, felt his mother's grip on his arm. Everyone was listening so closely that the whispered sneering comment of Old Man Thornycroft to the man next to him was audible, "What's all this got to do with the case?" [Pg 189]

"The p'int I'm gettin' to is this," went on Mr. Kirby, not paying attention to him: "a dog is not like a cow or a horse or any four-footed critter. He's a individual, an' so the courts have held him in spirit if not in actual words. Now this court of mine here in Tom Belcher's sto' ain't like other courts. I have to do the decidin' myself; I have to interpret the true spirit of the law without technicalities an' quibbles such as becloud it in other an' higher courts. An' I hold that since a dog is *de facto* an' *de jury* an individual, he has a right to life, liberty, an' the pursuit of happiness.

"Therefore, gentlemen, I hold that that hound dog, Buck, had a perfect right to follow that boy, Davy Allen, there; an' I hold that Davy Allen was not called on to drive that dog back, or interfere in any way with that dog followin' him if the dog so chose. You've heard the evidence of the boy. You know, an' I know, he has spoke the truth this day, an' there ain't no evidence to the contrary. The boy did not entice the dog. He even went down the road, leavin' him behind. He run back only when the dog was in dire need an' chokin' to death. He wasn't called on to put that block an' chain back on the dog. He couldn't help it if the dog followed him. He no more stole that dog than I stole him. He's no more of a thief than I am. I dismiss this case, Mr. Thornycroft, this case you've brought against Davy Allen. I declare him innocent of the charge of theft. I set it down right here on the records of this court."

[Pg 190]

"Davy!" gasped Mrs. Allen. "Davy!"

But, face working, eyes blazing, Old Man Thornycroft started forward, and the dog, panting, shrank between boy and mother. "Jim Kirby!" cried the old man, stopping for a moment in the cleared space. "You're magistrate. What you say goes. But that dog thar—he's mine! He's my property—mine by law!" He jerked a piece of rope out of his overcoat pocket and came on toward the cowering dog. "Tom Belcher, Bob Kelley! Stop that dog! He's mine!"

"Davy!" Mrs. Allen was holding the boy. "Don't—don't say anything. You're free to go home. Your record's clear. The dog's his!"

"Hold on!" Mr. Kirby had risen from his chair. "You come back here, Mr. Thornycroft. This court's not adjourned yet. If you don't get back, I'll stick a fine to you for contempt you'll remember the rest of your days. You stand where you are, sir! Right there! Don't move till I'm through!"

Quivering, the old man stood where he was. Mr. Kirby sat down, face flushed, eyes blazing. "Punch up that fire, Tom Belcher," he said. "I ain't through yet."

[Pg 191]

The hound came tremblingly back to Davy, looked up in his face, licked his hand, then sat down at his side opposite his former master, looking around now and then at the old man, terror in his eyes. In the midst of a deathly silence the magistrate resumed.

"What I was goin' to say, gentlemen, is this: I'm not only magistrate, I'm an officer in an organization that you country fellers likely don't know of, an organization known as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. As such an officer it's my duty to report an' bring to trial any man who treats a dumb brute in a cruel an' inhuman way. Mr. Thornycroft, judgin' by the looks of that houn', you ain't give him enough to eat to keep a cat alive—an' a cat, we all know, don't eat much, just messes over her vittles. You condemned that po' beast, for no fault of his own, to the life of a felon. A houn' ain't happy at best, he's melancholy; an' a houn' that ain't allowed to run free is of all critters the wretchedest. This houn's neck is rubbed raw. God only knows what he's suffered in mind an' body. A man that would treat a dog that way ain't fitten to own one. An' I hereby notify you that, on the evidence of this boy, an' the evidence before our eyes, I will indict you for breakin' the law regardin' the treatment of animals; an' I notify you, furthermore, that as magistrate I'll put the law on you for that same thing. An' it might be interestin' to you to know, sir, that I can fine you as much as five hundred dollars, or send you to jail for one year, or both, if I see fit—an' there ain't no tellin' but what I will see fit, sir."

[Pg 192]

He looked sternly at Thornycroft.

"Now I'm goin' to make a proposition that I advise you to jump at like you never jumped at anything before. If you will give up that houn' Buck—to me, say, or to anybody I decide will be kind to him—I will let the matter drop. If you will go home like a peaceable citizen, you won't hear no more about it from me; but if you don't—"

"Git out of my way!" cried Old Man Thornycroft. "All of you! I'm goin'—I'm goin'!"

"Hold on!" said Mr. Kirby, when he had got almost to the door. "Do you, in the presence of these witnesses, turn over this dog to me, relinquishin' all claims to him, on the conditions named? Answer. Yes or No?"

There was a moment's silence; then the old man cried out:

"Take the old hound! He ain't wuth the salt in his vittles!"

He jerked the door open.

"Yes, or no?" called Mr. Kirby inexorably.

"Yes!" yelled the old man, and slammed the door behind him.

"One minute, gentlemen," said Mr. Kirby, rising from the table and gathering his papers and records together. "Just one more thing: If anybody here has any evidence, or knows of any,

[Pg 193]

tendin' to show that this boy Davy Allen is not the proper person to turn over a houn' dog to, I hope he will speak up." He waited a moment. "In the absence of any objections, an' considerin' the evidence that's been given here this mornin', I think I'll just let that dog go back the way he come. Thank you, gentlemen. Court's adjourned!"

IX

[Pg 194]

THE PURSUIT

Cyclone Bill Simmons, burly, hard, and crimson of face, turned an overheated runabout out of the blazing highway and into a grove of oaks where stood the convict camp.

"All right," he said. "Get out."

Tom Abercrombie, face drawn, hands manacled, clambered out of the car. He was a man of sixty or thereabout, long, lank, wiry, with a white patriarchal beard and white beetling brows. His cheap suit of black and his black slouch hat were covered with dust.

"This way," ordered Simmons.

As if he did not hear, the old man glanced about him: at the long, weather-stained tent, open at both ends and at the sides, and showing within two rows of untidy bunks; at the smaller tents that formed a hollow square; at the shed for mules deeper within the grove; at the small group of Negro convicts—cooks and trusties—who from near the big tent stared curiously at him.

"This way," repeated Simmons harshly.

The lean cheeks flushed. The old man looked quickly at Simmons, who during the twenty-mile drive from the county seat had not spoken a word to him. Then, head bowed, he followed the man toward one of the smaller tents.

[Pg 195]

It was plainly the guard tent; it stood at the entrance to the camp, where a path turned in from the road. In front, under the shade of an oak, were two or three splint-bottom chairs. And chained to the oak by a staple driven into the trunk, drowsing in the heat of the summer mid-afternoon, lay a bloodhound.

He had barely looked up when the car drove in. His heavy black body with its tan belly and legs was completely relaxed, and he was panting slightly. His head, which he held up as with an effort, was massive, leonine, rugged, with chops and dewlaps that hung loosely down, giving the impression of a detached and judicial attitude toward life. His expression was grave, thoughtful, melancholy, as if his ancestors, pondering through the centuries on the frailty of humanity as they saw it, had set their indelible stamp of gloom and sorrow on his face. Toward him the burly guard and the tall bearded prisoner made their way.

There are men to whom no dog can be insensible; men with a secret quality of magnetism or understanding which makes any dog, at their approach, look up. When Simmons passed the great hound did not stir; but when Tom Abercrombie came opposite him, he lifted his muzzle, grizzled with age, and his melancholy, amber-coloured eyes met the man's.

[Pg 196]

The old man stopped. It was as if he had found, in all this strangeness, a friend. He spoke before he thought—half under his breath.

"Old Whiskers," he said gently. "Old Gray Whiskers."

Simmons turned in a flash, his face suddenly more crimson than ever, his eyes blazing.

"What did you say to that dog?" he yelled.

The old man looked at him steadily but did not reply.

"Now here!" The guard's voice rang out in the grove. "I know you, Abercrombie, and I know your game, you bloody, long-whiskered, knife-totin' throat-cutter. You are tryin' to make friends with that dog!"

He went to a near-by bush, got out his knife, and cut a heavy switch.

"Take this," he commanded. "Oh, you can catch hold of it! Catch it with both hands. Never mind the bracelets. Take it. Hit that dog. Hit him!"

The dreamlike state in which the old man had been wandering dissolved. His eyes narrowed to mere slits behind the beetling brows. The cold steel of the mountaineer, the mountaineer who weighs his words, was in the slow-drawled reply:

"Wal, now, I reckon I won't."

[Pg 197]

A moment they faced one another, Simmons' eyes murderous. Some fear of an investigation if he struck the old man, something daunting, too, that he saw in the mountaineer's eyes, restrained him.

"Abercrombie," he said, and moistened his lips with his tongue, "I brought out in that car three boxes of shotgun shells—buckshot—extra heavy loaded. Get me?"

Such was the initiation of old Tom Abercrombie as a convict. That afternoon he was entered on the books as a "dangerous" prisoner; that night he lay on an iron cot, staring up at the roof of a solitary tent, which, according to law, had to be provided for him. On his ankles were locked two steel anklets connected by a chain eighteen inches long. This chain, in turn, was locked to the cot.

Shame lay with him as he stared upward—shame and a terrible loneliness and dread of the future. At sunset he had watched a long line of shackled Negroes, followed by guards with shotguns, file into camp. To-morrow he himself would be one of that gang; and not only to-morrow, but for two years. Assault and Battery with Intent to Kill—this was the verdict of the court in Greenville in which he had been tried. And yet he hadn't intended to kill anybody, he had only meant to remonstrate.

Three young fellows, sitting at a table in a cheap ice-cream parlour—it had seemed a crystal palace to the old man and to Molly his wife, fresh from the deepest recesses of the mountains—had made fun of Molly and her sunbonnet.

[Pg 198]

When they did that, the mirrors that lined the walls, the enamelled-top tables, the sunlit street showing through wide-open doors, had all turned red before his eyes. He had risen from his chair and gone toward this seat of the scornful. "You fellers," he had warned in a low voice, "you fellers don't want to say anything like that again."

They had looked at him in sullen astonishment; then they had sprung to their feet. According to the testimony they gave in court, he had confronted one of them, an open knife hidden up his sleeve. This was not true, and he denied it stoutly on the stand. As a matter of fact, he had not thought of his knife until the three young bruisers, habitués of the place and of the questionable pool-room in the rear, rushed him all together, and a dirty-aproned waiter, coming up from behind, hit him a crack that jarred his skull. Then he had sprung back and drawn his knife.

The wounds he inflicted were not serious, he had simply held his assailants off; but the policeman who ran in, followed by a crowd, found the knife in his hand. The testimony was against him; besides, he did not make a good witness. No man does who holds something back. And what old Tom held back was the remark the young men had made.

On that point his lips were stubbornly sealed. He did not even tell his lawyer. As for Molly, she had not heard. Poor girl, she was a bit deaf, her sunbonnet came down close over her ears, and she had been eating her ice cream, oblivious. He did not want her to know, ever. He did not want the court to hear. What's more, he did not mean that it should hear.

[Pg 199]

The courts of justice, like the mills of the gods, ought to grind slowly and grind exceeding small—sifting carefully the evidence, examining deeply into the character and motives of accuser and accused. But the gods have eternity at their disposal, and their mills are run by unerring, self-administering laws, while the courts are sometimes harassed with a heavy docket that must be got through with and laws are made and administered by erring mortals. When they are overcrowded, there is inevitably, now and then, a victim.

Hence old Tom Abercrombie, chained to a cot, staring up at the roof of a tent, oppressed with a terrible loneliness; thinking of a long double cabin in a mountain-girded valley, far over the Tennessee line, where he and Molly had lived forty years; of the cornfields in a creek bottom, of children and of grandchildren, of widely scattered neighbours and friends.

Next day he was put to driving four mules hitched to a road scraper. Chains clanking, he had to climb as best he could into the iron seat. The humiliation of striped clothes he was spared; that barbarity had been done away with by law. He wore his black trousers, a blue shirt, and his broad-brimmed hat. Once on the seat no one passing along the road could see his shackles, but as if they were heated red-hot these symbols of shame burned into his flesh.

[Pg 200]

In the road ahead and in the road behind Negro pickers and shovellers toiled away, watched over by guards with shotguns. He saw the eyes of these guards turn constantly toward him. "You want to watch that old devil," Simmons had warned them. "He's dangerous."

The days that followed were all alike: days of toil that began before sunrise, continued through blazing middays, and ended after sundown. Always, before and behind, the gang picked and shovelled, always the eyes of the guards were turning toward him. Always against the horizon the mountains, flecked at midday with clouds and shadows, beckoned him like a mirage.

Sometimes from the top of a hill, under his broad hat, he studied the lay of the land. In his mind he mapped out the water courses and the stretches of woodland that led with least open country to the mountains. Sometimes at night he dreamed of a double cabin in a cool mountain-girded valley.

"You want to watch him," warned Simmons again and again.

Once Molly came to see him. Simmons himself, at the guard tent, questioned her roughly, then shrugged his shoulders and let her pass. Throughout the interview, though, he sat over there by the guard tent, his eyes always on the two of them; and at his side, but never looking up at him, lay Sheriff, the bloodhound, panting.

[Pg 201]

She told him how hard she had tried to get him off; how hard his friends had tried. They had been to see the solicitor, the sheriff, and finally the governor himself. "They were all nice to me, Tom," she declared; "but they say they can't do nothin'. The governor talked to me a long time in his office. He asked all about us—where we lived, how many children we had, how it all happened. But he says he was elected to see the laws carried out, an' can't interfere.

"We done everything we could," she went on, "even the folks that live 'round here an' have seen you workin', po' man, with the gang—even they tried to help. Squire Kirby an' Mr. Earle, him that lives in that big white house they call Freedom Hill, up the road whar you been workin', they headed the petition. They are the richest folks 'round here. They heered the trial, Tom. They know you was set upon in that low-down place. Mr. Earle, he went to the capitol with me to see the governor. Him and the governor are ol' friends. Mr. Earle, he bought my railroad ticket and paid my board in Greenville. He talked to the governor for over an hour.... But"—she shook her head—"it never done no good.

[Pg 202]

"Here's what folks say, though," she whispered quickly. "If you got away back into Tennessee the law wouldn't follow you. Mr. Earle, he told me that, just yistiddy, Tom. Squire Kirby he says the same thing. Tom, the sheriff hisself as good as told me. The governor wouldn't requisition you, they all's good as said. He wouldn't, either, Tom. I know he wouldn't."

Then her eyes widened with horror. "Oh, I wasn't goin' to tell you that!" she gasped. "Don't try to get away. That man over yonder, he'll kill you, Tom. Folks said he would—said he had killed two. I know he will, since I've seen him. He's awful, awful!"

She went on protesting, in terror that he would try to do the very thing she had suggested. She told him about the bloodhound. The newspaper men said he never lost a trail—that nobody who stayed on the ground had ever got away from him.

"They know ever'thing, these newspaper men," she went on. "They advised me right. Tom, two years ain't long. We waited longer than that to get married. Remember, Tom? We ain't old yet....

"Poor old gal," said Tom.

It was the sight of a dilapidated and deserted blacksmith shop near the road they were widening, and of some rusted fragments of tools scattered about here and there, which caused old Tom, as the road-scraper passed and repassed the spot, to look very closely down into the upturned dirt. And it was the glimpse of something in that dirt which caused him suddenly to rein up the four mules and glance quickly in the direction of the two guards.

[Pg 203]

It was an afternoon of terrific heat, following a prolonged drought. In the road ahead the gang of Negro convicts toiled silently, sluggishly, in the blinding glare. Simmons had driven off in the direction of Greenville an hour before. The two remaining guards, with shotguns under their arms, stood in the scant shade of two dust-covered trees.

"Jake," said the old mountaineer calmly to the Negro on the machine behind him, the Negro who handled the levers, "Jake, there's a bolt loose some-whar' on this scrape. Reckon I better 'tend to it myself."

Without any apparent hurry, he clambered down from the seat. Quickly, secretly, he picked out of the upturned earth an object which he thrust into his shirt. Deliberately, as if encountering obstacles which caused him trouble, he hammered away at the supposed loose bolt. When at last he clambered back into the iron seat, heated like the top of a stove, there was just a slight flush on his lean cheeks and a brightness as of triumph in his deep-set eyes.

On the way back to camp they passed Tom Belcher's store. Here he asked permission of one of the guards (they were not all like Simmons) to go in and buy himself some tobacco. The guard who went in with him saw nothing suspicious in the fact that, along with the tobacco, the old man purchased also a package of chewing gum.

[Pg 204]

That night he did not sleep. By raising up on his elbows in his cot he could see, in a chair tilted back against an oak tree, the night guard with a gun across his knees and, farther on, in front of the guard tent, the outline of the bloodhound asleep. Once, when he thought the guard nodded, he reached in his shirt. He got out the object he had picked up in the road and rubbed it against his shackles. The rasp of file on steel sounded loud in his tent like an alarm. He thought he saw the guard stir and the bloodhound lift his head. He lay silently down again. Later he punched a hole in the mattress and stuck the file deep into the straw.

Next day he thought of Molly and home. As he sat on the road-scraper the mountains, purple and lofty against the sky, seemed now to be beckoning him. Once within them, once across the state line, the law would not follow him. He was satisfied of that from what Molly had told him.

He bided his time until one stormy night when wind and rain drove the bloodhound within the shelter of the guard tent and, thrashing through the branches of the oaks and flapping the canvas of the big tent, drowned out to all ears but his own the rasp of a file on steel. Next day the continued rain made road work impossible, and as he hobbled back and forth to feed the mules, chewing gum hid two triangular cuts in his shackles. Again that night, storm and rain drowned out the sound that came from the tent where he sat hunched forward on his cot, sawing patiently and methodically away.

[Pg 205]

Hours before dawn he slipped out of the rear of his tent and walked quickly toward the mule

sheds, where he stood listening. Then, hat pulled down low, he hurried through the grove, across a field, and made for the black rim of the surrounding forest.

He could not have picked a better night had choice been given him. The rain, falling steadily, was washing his trail. It was the season of full moon and in spite of storm clouds the night was dimly luminous. He struck straight for the bottoms and the creek, whose swollen turbulence sounded above the rain. He plunged into the water, which at the deepest places came no higher than his waist, and partly by feeling, partly by sight, now and then stumbling over boulders, now and then having to push aside thick underbrush, he made his way for something like two miles up-stream.

Carefully he chose the spot where he left the creek. His eyes, grown accustomed to the night, picked out a tree that grew out of the ground at a distance from the bank, then bent over it. He caught hold of the branches, swung himself up, felt his way like an opossum along the trunk, swung to another tree, and did not touch ground until he was some hundred feet from the shore.

[Pg 206]

An indistinct, dripping dawn that showed low-driving clouds found him, wet to the skin, like an old fox who has run all night, but confident, like one who has covered up all trace of a trail, making his steady way with long mountaineer's stride across tangled bottoms, into stretches of woodland, over hills that grew ever steeper and higher, through undergrowth that grew ever denser.

His face was very serious, but not anxious. His nerve was too cool, his courage too steady for him to feel any impulse to run. His lifelong experience as a hunter who travels far had taught him to save his energy. As the light of the gray day grew stronger he distinguished, at no great distance ahead, it seemed, the outlines of misty mountains. He recognized the gap where the highway crossed this first ridge into the recesses of the mountains, beyond the Tennessee line. On the night after to-morrow, he calculated, he could tramp up on his porch and Molly would open the door.

Now and then, as twilight advanced, he stopped and listened. One of the guards, more kindly disposed than Simmons and the other guard, had, during the hour of lunch one day, told him something about the bloodhound, Sheriff. The dog, he said, was not a full-bred bloodhound, his grandfather was a foxhound. Consequently, he ran a man freely, as a hound runs a fox, barking on the trail.

[Pg 207]

He was hard to hold in, the guard had gone on to say, so hard that Simmons never tried to run him to the leash, but turned him loose to find the track himself. Then Simmons followed as fast as he could. No trouble to follow him. "You never heard such a voice as he's got in your life," the guard had added with a grin. "He usually puts a man up a tree inside two hours, and keeps him there till Simmons comes up. No danger of the man comin' down, either—not with that dog at the bottom of the tree."

And so, remembering these things, old Tom stopped now and then to listen. No sound but the steady dripping of rain from trees—no sound of pursuit. Miles lay between him and the camp, and still the rain was washing his trail.

It was on top of a treeless hill that commanded the sights and sounds of the country for miles about that he stopped once more to listen—and his white hair stirred on his head, just as the hair of the old fox who has run all night might rise on his back. From far behind through the enveloping mists and over intervening hills, so far that at first he could not be sure, had come the bay of a solitary hound, trailing.

He stood transfixed, his patriarchal beard dripping. Many a creature, fox and wolf, and man himself, has through the centuries trembled at that sound. There was a silence during which he collected his wits, momentarily upset. Then again, faint and far away, like the ringing of a distant bell, came the sound. Miles between where he swung himself out of the creek and where he now stood the hound was coming on his trail. Tom turned like a stag, brushed aside the bushes and began for the first time to run.

[Pg 208]

At the top of the next hill, not having heard it while he crashed through the undergrowth of the bottom, he stopped again, panting. Though still far away and faint, it was unmistakable now, and there was in the sound a note of melancholy triumph and joy.

The shrewdness of all hunted animals took hold of the old man's nature. He ran half a mile, then turned and doubled his track. At a stony spot, where a trail does not remain long at best, he stopped, swung his arms and jumped as far as he could to the right. For a quarter of a mile he continued trotting at right angles to the original trail; then he turned once more toward the mountains.

He could hear it most of the time, even when he ran. Occasionally, as the dog crossed a bottom evidently, it was almost inaudible and seemed far away. Then as he reached a highland, it came clearer and surer, more resonant, and closer than ever. And now from back there, farther away than the dog, came a sound that for a moment chilled his blood—the wild, faint yell of a man urging the hound on.

[Pg 209]

Unreasoning rage stirred within the old man, flushed his face with hot blood, made his eyes blaze. Who was he to run from any man? Then quickly rage cooled and calculation took its place. He must throw that hound off his trail.

He back-tracked once more. He turned at right angles to his original trail. He continued for an

eighth of a mile, then turned back on his second track. He crossed the original trail at the point where he had left it, and kept straight on forming the letter T. Once more, on this short arm of the T he turned at right angles, this time toward the camp itself, and retracing his steps formed another T.

Thus he made an intricate pattern of trails, comparable somewhat to the visible marks made by a fancy skater. The hound, finding tracks running apparently in every direction, would grow bewildered. He would circle, of course, but the circles themselves would lead him off on tracks that turned back on themselves. As an additional puzzle, wherever the old man doubled, he put his arms about a tree and remained, his body pressed against the trunk a moment, as if he had climbed it. "His whiskers will be whiter than they are now," he grinned, "before ever he works all that out."

[Pg 210]

Two miles farther on, breathing hard, he sat down on a log, for he must have some rest. He knew when the oncoming hound, who had worked out the first and simpler puzzle, struck the second and intricate one. First deathlike silence—the hound had come to the end of the trail. Probably he was whiffing the trunks of the trees roundabout, looking up eagerly into them. As if he had been in one of those trees himself, Tom could see it all, so well did he know the way of a hound.

Still silence. The dog would be circling now. Followed an eager bay as he struck one of the misleading trails. He thought he was off! Then silence again, and after a moment the long-drawn howl of a hound, frankly perplexed, and the fierce, angry yell of a man far behind. With fingers that trembled because of the chase he had run, Tom reached in his pocket and got out a cob pipe. This he filled with tobacco, and fumbling in an upper pocket of his shirt, found some matches.

For ten minutes he sat on that fallen pine, smoking and listening to the unseen drama in the bottoms over there beyond the hill, his hopes ever rising, and with these hopes a gratifying sense of achievement and triumph. Once or twice the dog bayed uncertainly. Once or twice the man yelled, it seemed to him with lessened confidence. Once it sounded as if the hound had sat down on his haunches, raised his muzzle on high, and poured out to heaven his perplexity. Tom had seen them do that. Then another silence, as if the chase had died out.

[Pg 211]

Still Tom sat listening. In his exultation he had forgotten for the time home and Molly and the horrors he had left. Suddenly he rose, and his face was drawn and white. He turned and began to run, but even as he did so he knew that it was all over.

Between him and the farthest outskirts of the pattern he had worked out, had come one long-drawn, triumphant bay after another. The veteran, wiser by far than any dog Tom had ever known in all his knowledge of dogs, had worked the puzzle out, had run in ever-greater circles, keeping his head, knowing that somewhere, cutting the circumference of a greater circle, he would find the true and straight trail.

And he was coming, coming fast. He could not be more than a mile behind. He must be at the top of the hill where Tom had enjoyed his brief triumph, he must be smelling the very log on which Tom had sat. He had left the log. The sound burst on the old fugitive now, almost like a chorus, menacing, terrible, inexorable as fate. All the hills, all the valleys, were echoing as if a whole pack were running. How much worse than futile had been his tricks! They had only halted the great bloodhound long enough for men and shotguns to come up!

[Pg 212]

From now on he kept straight forward, sometimes walking, sometimes trotting, sometimes breaking into a run. Now and then he stumbled with weariness, once he fell face downward. Anybody but a fighter would have taken to a tree, like an opossum, run at last to shelter.

Out of breath, he came at length to the top of a ridge, and through an opening in the trees looked across a wooded valley beyond which rose the lofty undulations of the Tennessee mountains. The clouds had been growing thin, and now the sun burst through, and flooded those mountains with light.

"They ain't a-goin' to take me," said the old mountaineer—"not alive!"

Not even the fox waits for hounds to seize him; but, his race over, turns at bay and dies with his face to his enemies. And now, in the woods of the extensive bottoms that lay between the ridge and the mountains, old Tom Abercrombie, his race over, stopped and turned his face, toward his pursuers.

And as he did so all fear left him. His mind became as clear as the sparkling sunlight about him. He was no longer a fleeing animal matching wits with a pursuing one. He was a man standing upright, looking oncoming fate in the face.

Old Tom did not think of it this way. And yet, perhaps because of some sense of the fitness of things, he took off his hat and dropped it beside him. Near at hand a giant sycamore, dead and leafless, rose loftily above the smaller growth into the sky. Beside this tree he stood, his white hair and beard dishevelled and glistening in the sun, his eyes, that had shown a momentary despair when he sprang up from the log, steady, fierce, undismayed.

[Pg 213]

If the hound attacked him he would fight—fight with his hands, for he had no other weapon. If the hound merely bayed him, he would wait until the guards came up. Their commands he would disregard: he would not even throw up his hands. He knew what the result would be, he had no illusions about that: Simmons would kill him.

He did think of Molly. He saw her, all her life tramping back and forth from the spring to the house, solitary and lonely; he saw the cornfield in the bottom, where he had ploughed so many springs. He saw the faces of children and grandchildren, one by one. These things made him choke, but they had no effect upon his mind: that was made up. Life is good but it is not worth some things.

All these impressions ran through his mind, swiftly, independent of the element of time. As a matter of fact, there was not sufficient interval for connected thought. Ahead of him was an open place in the woods, a place strewn with flinty stones and arrowheads, with now and then a black and rounded boulder, rolled there by glaciers that had once moved over the face of the earth. This open spot, made barren by forces older than man himself, he had crossed in one last effort to make his trail difficult for the hound.

[Pg 214]

His eyes were fastened on it now. The sun, hot and brilliant since the passing of the storms, blazed down upon it. On the other side the forest grew dense and high like a wall of green. And now out of this forest, into the ancient opening, came the hound.

Tom had never felt any grudge against the dog—he was only obeying a law of his nature, only running a trail. Fascinated, he watched the animal, oblivious for the moment of the significance of his presence. He had been running fast in the forest, but now on this flinty and difficult ground he slackened his pace and came on slowly, like a patient, methodical fellow who makes sure he's right as he goes along. His nose, almost touching the ground, never left the trail.

In crossing the opening the old man's foot had turned on a stone; he had staggered, and placed his hand against one of the black boulders for support. And now, when the hound came to this spot he stopped; he lifted his head and whiffed the rock the man had touched with his hand. Next, he reared up on the boulder and looked at its top. Then he came on, nose low once more, pendulous ears actually dragging on the ground, tail erect and now and then wagging stiffly as with joy.

[Pg 215]

While Tom still watched him he raised his muzzle; and there came from his throat a deep, musical, bell-like challenge that echoed loudly in the opening itself and more airily and sweetly between the ridge and the mountains beyond. In answer, from a mile behind, so Tom calculated, came a far more terrible sound—the wild, savage yells of two men, one wilder and more savage than the other.

The old man took a deep breath and his beard was thrust suddenly forward. But for the dog, those men would be helpless. But for the dog, he could turn now, and the woods would swallow him up. In a flash an inspiration was born, a conquering purpose such as must have entered the mind of prehistoric man. He waited, his eyes on the hound.

A dog is nearsighted at best, and Sheriff was old. When he was a short two hundred feet from the tree there came to his nose the smell, not of a trail itself, but of the man who made the trail. He stopped and lifted his head. A moment he stared. Then he raised his grizzled muzzle to the sky and poured out to high heaven the announcement that here in the woods at the end of the trail, standing beside a tree, was a man!

Then he started back, amazed, for this man, instead of climbing the tree, as all men did when he bayed them, was coming straight toward him. His hand was outstretched, his eyes were blazing, and there was a smile on his face. "Old Whiskers!" he was saying. "Hush, now, hush! Hush!" The man had stooped down, his hand still extended. "Come here!" he commanded.

[Pg 216]

The great hound began to tremble. Those terrible eyes were looking deep into his. They were commanding him, they were pleading, too. He had seen them before, back there in the camp, and he had not forgotten.

He heard behind him another yell. He tried to look back, but the eyes held him. "No!" the man cried sternly—then, "Old boy—old Whiskers!" He began to pant; the bay he would have uttered died in his throat. Another yell and another, still he did not reply. His tail was tucked now. He was looking at the man wonderingly, beseechingly. His universe was changing, was centring in that man before him, that man who understood.

Again the yells, and now, beyond the opening behind, the faint crash of running footsteps. His hair rose on his back with rage. His world had turned about. Those were his enemies coming. All the loyalty of his dog's soul had gone out to this man who understood, all his hatred to those who never had. He started to turn about. He would meet them in the opening. He would rush at them.

"No!" cried the man who understood.

When he looked at Tom once more the miracle of ages past had been repeated; the man saw in the eyes of the dog, trust, humility, undying devotion. His voice trembled for the first time.

[Pg 217]

"Old Whiskers," he said gently. "Old Gray Whiskers! Quick now!"

The pursuing guards never knew why the woods ahead of them grew suddenly silent, why the tree-bay of the bloodhound that had sounded once clear and unmistakable sounded no more, though as they ran they filled the morning with their yells. They did not see the great hound go trembling to the man. They did not see the old man for just a second catch the massive head between his hands.

They did not see the two turn and disappear, swiftly, silently, into the undergrowth that grew densely behind the open space and the giant sycamore tree.

When, all out of breath, they reached the spot from whence had proceeded the solitary tree-bay, they looked about at vacant woods. Frantically they searched the undergrowth, shotguns ready, calling to each other in their excitement. Man and dog had vanished as if they had never been.

But Simmons did not believe in miracles. "The old devil killed the dog!" he cried. "He had a knife about him. But where's the blood and where's the body?"

They hurried here and there as they glimpsed red spots, only to find a leaf killed by the sun and fallen before season, or a bush reddened by berries. [Pg 218]

"We miscalculated the spot," swore Simmons. "It wasn't here it happened."

And he sat down out of breath and leaned his burly back against the trunk of a giant sycamore tree.

The sun was dropping over the mountains when the two guards, empty-handed, got back to camp. The valleys lay in shadow, but far up in the enormous folds of the Tennessee mountains its last crimson rays shone on a bearded old man trudging along a narrow road toward the west.

He looked weary and footsore and his clothes were torn by briars. But his face was alight, as if with anticipation of to-morrow. Now and then he spoke. And behind him a great, strange-looking, long-eared hound lifted his head, as if drinking in the sound of his voice.

X

[Pg 219]

THE LITTLE BOY IN THE BLACKBERRY PATCH

Something strange was going on down there in the woods behind the barn. Little Tommy Earle was convinced of it as soon as he saw old Frank, Irish setter, come galloping across the cottonfields from that direction. For old Frank was excited, that was plain; and old Frank didn't get excited for nothing.

Accordingly, Tommy dropped his wagon tongue, and watched the old boy round the barn, jump the lot fence, and run into the yard. His red silken ears were thrown back, his brown eyes were shining, and he was looking for somebody to tell his secret to.

"F'ank!" called the boy.

At the call the old fellow's ears flattened and he threw up his head, then he came running straight to Tommy. There was an eager light in his eyes that said plain as words, "Come with me and I'll show you something."

Tommy's heart began to pound. From the kitchen window above his head came the flop-flop of a churn, accompanied by the wailing song of Aunt Cindy, the cook. Tommy glanced shrewdly up at this window from whence proceeded the melancholy refrain. He must not let Aunt Cindy see him leave the yard. That morning after breakfast his father and mother had driven off hurriedly in the car, following a telephone message from Greenville that said Aunt Janet, his mother's sister, was sick in a hospital. His mother had told him she would be gone several days, and meanwhile he must do everything Aunt Cindy told him to do and nothing she did not tell him to do. [Pg 220]

But Tommy had no doubt whatever what Aunt Cindy's answer would be if he asked permission to leave the yard and follow Frank into the woods. She would put her foot down on it flat, and Aunt Cindy had a big foot. Better leave right now, while the old woman was in the midst of her churning and her song.

"All right, F'ank," whispered Tommy.

They went by a circuitous route that placed first the garage, then the barn, between them and the kitchen window. Then they broke into a run across the cottonfield and entered the woods, Frank leading. They had not gone far when Tommy stopped—stopped suddenly. Ahead of him was an opening where the sun blazed down; and in the midst of this opening was a creature picking blackberries.

Its face, round and sunburned, was smeared with the red juice, as were its hands, with which it was reaching for more. It stopped eating when it discovered Tommy's presence and looked steadily Tommy's way. It was a boy about Tommy's own size, a boy he had never seen before! [Pg 221]

Under a white cloth hat Tommy's eyes narrowed. What right did that boy have to come on his father's place and pick blackberries? He didn't have on any hat, either; his hair looked as if it had never been cut; his clothes were ragged. Ordinarily, Tommy rather admired these things, but now, taking in the whole appearance of the intruder, he glanced about quickly at some rocks that lay near-by, rocks the right size to throw.

But evidently the boy didn't want to fight.

"Heh!" he said.

"Heh," said Tommy.

"What's your name?"

"Tommy—what's yours?"

"Joe."

A minute's silence followed this exchange of essential information. Tommy drew nearer Joe. Joe drew nearer Tommy.

"That your dog?"

"Yes—he's my dog."

"He come down here just now. What's his name?"

"F'ank."

Another silence. Then the boy spoke.

"I seen some fishes down thar in the crick jus' now."

[Pg 222]

"I've seen 'em—lots of times."

"Say—what about goin' down thar now?"

"I don't care," said Tommy.

An hour later they came out of the woods together and started for the house, old Frank strolling along pleasantly behind them. Joe's hair was wet and plastered down over his face like an Indian's; Tommy's was also wet under the white cloth hat. They had done more than look at fish; they had gone in with them.

Tommy walked close to Joe: he had learned many thrilling facts, among them that Joe lived in Greenville and had run away. This he had found out, not all at once, but in fragments, while they splashed water over one another, and later while they sat on the shaded bank of the creek.

Somebody had "beat Joe up—see!" Joe had exhibited a welt on his shoulder and another on his leg in proof of the assertion. It seems that previous to this Joe had swiped some bananas from the fruit stand of one Tony, and that, previous to that, Joe had been hungry—"Hung'y as hell" was Joe's way of putting it—a way that commended itself to Tommy at once as being extremely picturesque. In fact, even while Joe talked he kept on saying it over and over in his mind, so fine was the phrase and so expansive.

There had been a "cop" in the story. Tommy did not know what a cop was until Joe told him. "Dam ol' cop" was the phrase, to be exact. The cop had chased him, then Joe had run away. It seemed that he didn't stop running for a long time. There was also the driver of a motor truck in the story, Mike by name. Mike drove the truck that carried an oil tank from the city to a town. Mike had given him a lift; Mike often did that. When they got out in the country here, Joe had asked Mike to let him down—he wanted to get some blackberries. Mike had said he would pick Joe up on the way back.

[Pg 223]

Such was the thriller Tommy had listened to. It hadn't come easy, this story, but only after repeated questions. Now and then, while he was telling it, Joe had looked at Tommy with a wry, wise grin, as if sizing him up. He was little, and he couldn't talk plainly, but he seemed old somehow. We live in deeds, not in years, as the poet says.

Joe was still grinning when they came into the back yard. He had held back a time or two, as if he were afraid of that big house on the hill, but Tommy had over-persuaded him. There wasn't anybody at home, he had declared, but there were biscuits and jam in the kitchen.

Halfway between the barn lot and the house they were confronted by Aunt Cindy. She was an enormous black woman, dressed always in starched gingham and apron, with a red bandanna handkerchief on her head.

[Pg 224]

"Whar you been, honey?" she demanded; then sternly: "Whose chile dat you got wid you?"

Tommy did not reply; in fact, he didn't know; what's more, he didn't care. It was Joe, that was enough.

She was towering above them now.

"Who yo' ma an' pa, chile?" she demanded of the miniature Marco Polo who had come home with her charge. "Whar you come from?"

Marco Polo did not reply. He only grinned up at her, an impertinent, scrappy sort of grin. In a hard school he had learned the virtue of silence.

"I found him in the woods," volunteered Tommy at last. "He's lost an' he's goin' to stay wif me."

"Stay wid you, honey?" cried the old woman. "No, honey," she shook her head. "He ain't gwine stay wid you."

And she meant it, too, every word of it. Society to her was divided into quality white folks like the Earles, black folks like herself, and poor white trash like this waif; and between the first class and the third was there a great gulf fixed.

"We gwine fin' who he ma an' pa is, honey, an' sen' him home," was her verdict.

"You ain't goin' to send him home!" cried Tommy, his face suddenly crimson. "He ain't got no home. You ain't goin' to send him anywhere. He's goin' to stay here wif me. He ain't had anything to eat but blackberries. He's hungry as"—the phrase was almost out, but he throttled it—"He's hungry!"

[Pg 225]

The old woman looked at the waif shrewdly.

"You hongry?" she asked. "Well, one thing's shore—nobody ever come to Freedom Hill hongry an' went away hongry. You sho' gwine have somethin' to eat. Den we sen' you home."

She led the way into a kitchen, spacious and cool. She made them wash their hands while she looked on, shaking her head at the condition of one pair of them. She set them down to a table and placed before them biscuits and butter and jam, and cold milk from the refrigerator. But while she performed this act of hospitality her face showed the determination she had expressed.

The kitchen opened by a white-panelled passageway into the dining room, and the dining room into the big front hall. She left the two of them and went into the hall. They heard her ringing the telephone, and while they ate her talk came to them.

"Dat you, Mr. Davis? Mr. Davis, dis me. Mr. Davis, dey's a strange chile here. Tommy say he foun' him in de woods. He won't tell who he ma an' pa is, or whar he come from. Tommy say he los'. Mr. Steve ain't comin' back till to-morrow. What I gwine do, Mr. Davis? Call up Mr. Bob Kelley? All right, suh—yes, suh. Das what I'll do."

[Pg 226]

Joe looked at Tommy with a grin.

"What's that ol' nigger talkin' about?" he asked.

Tommy's eyes narrowed. Old Aunt Cindy wasn't to be called that even by such a travelled and honoured gentleman as his present guest.

"Don't call her a nigger," he said. "Hear?"

Joe nodded. There was a touch of wistfulness in his eyes now—there had been, ever since he entered this mansion stocked with biscuit and jam.

The old woman's voice came to the diners clearly now. She always grew excited when she talked over the telephone.

"Dat you, Mr. Bob Kelley? Dis Cindy over at Mr. Steve Earle. Mr. Kelley, dey's a stray chile here. Yes, suh, jus' drap from de clouds. Mr. John Davis he say you likely git some inquiries about him. Mr. Kelley, I gwine sen' him over to yo' house by Jake. Yes, suh—dis evenin', right away."

Tommy slid down from his chair. Joe went on with his biscuits and jam. A dirty little hand that two bathings had not whitened closed tight around a slender white glass of cold milk. Tommy ran into the hall.

"You ain't goin' to send him away!" he cried. "He's goin' to stay here wif me. He's goin' to sleep wif me. Hear, Aunt Cindy?"

Still protesting, he was following her through the hall, out on the high-columned front porch, and around the house toward the barn.

[Pg 227]

"Hit won't do, honey," she was saying over and over. "You listen to yo' mammy now, you 'pen' on her. He ain't de chile for you to play wid. You can't touch de kittle an' not git smut on you. Yo' ol' mammy know. She raise you from a baby. Don't pull at my skirts, honey. It don't do no good. Yo' ol' mammy always is ak de bes' way for you, honey, an' she always will. Mis' Bob Kelley, she'll be good to him. Mr. Bob Kelley, he'll fin' out whar de chile belong."

She stopped in the back yard, near the lot.

"Jake!" she called. "Oh, Jake!"

From a cabin beside the garden an elongated darky uncoiled himself out of a split-bottom chair and sauntered leisurely toward her.

"Jake, hitch up Nelly to de buggy. Dey's a los' chile here. I done spoke to Mr. Bob Kelley 'bout him, an' I want you to take him over dar."

Then Tommy broke loose; then the future master of Freedom Hill asserted his authority. He might obey the old woman in such minor matters as washing his face and putting on a clean nightgown, but here was something different. He stood before Aunt Cindy and Jake with blazing eyes and defied them. He forebade Jake to hitch up Nelly.

"He's goin' to stay here, I tell you! He's goin' to stay wif me!"

"Lordy, lordy!" laughed Jake, and fell back three steps, his hand over his mouth. "Ain't dat boy like he paw!"

[Pg 228]

"He's goin' to stay wif me! He's goin' to stay wif me!"

And even Aunt Cindy gave in. The spirit of Steve Earle had spoken in Steve Earle's child.

When they went back into the kitchen an oblivious diner sat at the kitchen table, bent over a plate, and still mopped up blackberry jam with buttered biscuit.

That night the full moon, declining over the sheltering eaves of the mansion, sent its rays into the windows of the big upstairs bedroom. First they fell on a bed where lay one boy asleep, as he had slept all his life, on soft mattresses, between white sheets. Then the silver light crept slowly over the bed, across the floor, where it seemed to linger a while on a pile of toys—an engine with three passenger cars, a red hook and ladder whose fiery horses galloped forever, a picture book open at the place where a man in shaggy skins, with a shaggy umbrella, stared with bulging eyes at a track in the sand. And last this gentle light climbed upon another bed and embraced a swarthy little figure lying on its side, one arm stretched out, one fist closed tight, as if to keep fast hold on this chance life had thrown his way.

Never before had this child slept on a soft mattress, never before in a clean nightgown; never before that night had he seen a tiled bathroom and a white tub where water ran. On one sturdy leg that braced the body as it lay on the side the moonlight revealed a ridged place, a scar, purple and hard. But the hard grin was gone now, the face in repose; and the peering moon, which so silently inspected that room and its inmates, might have had a hard time deciding, so serene were the two small faces, which, in the years to come, would be, please God, the gentleman, and which, God forbid, the ruffian! [Pg 229]

The two were up at sunrise. Jennie, the maid, dressed them in clothes just alike—all except shoes—Joe drew the line there. They ate breakfast in the dining room, Tommy in his own chair, the visitor elevated to the proper height by a dictionary. They ate oatmeal and cream, waffles and syrup. While the dew still sparkled on the lawn and on the thousands of tiny morning spiderwebs stretched along the hedges, they went out into the yard, where old Frank came running to meet them with his morning welcome of wagging tail.

But the grin had come back to the visitor's face now. He was afraid of Aunt Cindy, of the maid, of Jake, of all grown folks. In vain Tommy tried to play with him: he did not know how to play—a wagon was a wagon to him, nothing more; a stick a stick, and not a horse to be ridden. Tommy gave it up. They walked around inspecting things, like little old men. Now and then the visitor swore, the oaths coming naturally, like any other talk. He did not even know he was swearing. Tommy, listening, grinned now and then, looking at his visitor with comprehending eyes. The little shrill oaths fascinated him; as for the child who uttered them, God had never entered his garden in the cool of the evening, and he didn't know he was naked. [Pg 230]

Meanwhile, in the kitchen, an old black woman, seeing them saunter about, followed by old Frank, and noting that they did not play but talked, shook her wise head.

"I wish Mr. Steve would come," she said. "He teachin' dat chile things he ought not to know."

He came early in the afternoon. Tommy saw the long shining car turn in at the end of the avenue and Frank race to meet it. At the boy's cry that yonder came Papa, Joe turned and started toward the barn.

"Where you goin'?" demanded Tommy.

"He'll beat me up," said Joe.

While the car hummed up the avenue the two stood close together, Tommy's face earnest as he argued and reassured.

The car stopped near the garage. A tall, clean-shaved man in palm beach clothes and panama hat came toward them. "Hello, old man," he said and stooped down and kissed one boy; then straightening up: "Who's this you've got with you?"

"Joe," said Tommy simply. [Pg 231]

He saw the keen look in the gray eyes, the smile that caused the fine wrinkles to gather about their corners way up there under the panama hat.

"Well, Joe—where did you drop from?"

Then Aunt Cindy called the master of Freedom Hill aside, and Tommy saw the old woman talking earnestly up into his face. His father nodded, then came toward them, smiling.

"All right, boys," he said. "Come up on the porch where it's cool, and tell me all about it."

But Joe would not tell. He drew away and looked at the man with that scrappy grin. Silence, secretiveness where grown people were, had been beaten into his small brain. Out behind the house, the conference finished, Tommy reassured his guest again and again, sometimes laughing, sometimes very earnest.

"Oh, he won't hurt you, Joe!"

But Joe's chest was rising and falling. He was afraid of Steve Earle, afraid of those powerful arms, even of those kind gray eyes.

An hour later Steve Earle called Tommy to him.

"Keep him with you, son," he said. "I'm going to Greenville."

He came back in the afternoon. From the orchard they saw him get out of the car and go up on the porch. Joe would not come back to the house. He did consent, though, to venture into the yard, near the barn. They were sitting on the concrete base of the windmill when from around the house Tommy saw Mr. John Davis and his wife drive up the avenue and get out near the porch. They lived across the creek and were neighbours. They did not have a car, but drove an old white horse named Charlie, who was always pricking up his ears at you, hoping you would give him an apple. Mr. Davis had a long beard and Mrs. Davis was stout and wore spectacles.

[Pg 232]

"You go and see what they want," grinned Joe. "I'll stay here."

In vain Tommy begged him to come, too. They weren't going to hurt him. They would give him apples. Joe shook his head. He didn't want any apples.

So Tommy went, Frank following. They were sitting on the porch, talking to his father. Yes, they were talking about Joe; and Tommy catching the infection of secrecy from his guest, stopped at the side of the portico that set high off the ground, where he could hear without being seen, while old Frank, panting, lay down beside him.

He knew the voices of them all. He often went with his father across the fields to Mr. Davis's house. It was always a delightful excursion. The Davises didn't have any cook or maid, but they had a grape arbour whose vines formed a roof thick as a house, and out in the garden they had a row of bee gums painted white. They lived alone; they had no children, which struck Tommy as being strange, like not having a dog or a cow. The water at their well was very cool, and you drew it with a bucket. While his father and Mr. Davis talked on the porch, Mrs. Davis would call him in the kitchen, him and Frank both. She seemed to be forever making a cake. He would talk to her and tell her all about Frank. He was always sorry when time came to go home.

[Pg 233]

Mr. Davis was talking now. He always talked in a mumbling way, because of his beard that the words got tangled in. They thought the child had been sent away until they got Steve's message just now. They came right over. So the boy was still here. Well, he was glad of that.

"I know this much about it, Steve," he went on. "Yesterday afternoon the driver of a truck stopped by Squire Kirby's house on the big road and asked the Squire and his wife if they had seen a boy. That's all I know."

"Well, I know more than that," Steve said. "I've been to Greenville and found out about him from the people at the settlement house. A fruit dealer reported him to the police for stealing bananas, and the police passed the case on to them. The kid lives with a man named Grimsley, in a shack down by the river, in the gas-tank section. You know what that neighbourhood is, John."

"The settlement house questioned the neighbours. It seems that the kid's parents are dead, and that Grimsley is an uncle by marriage. He's a brute, even for the gas-tank section. The neighbours hear him beating the little devil—see him doing it! He threatens the kid with policemen all the time. The result is that the child lives in deadly terror of all policemen, and will run like a rabbit at the sight of one."

[Pg 234]

"Oh, poor little thing!" cried Mrs. Davis, and Davis growled something that was lost in the tangle of his beard.

Tommy heard his father knock the ashes out of his pipe.

"The settlement-house people," he went on, "are taking steps to get control of the child. They've laid the case before Judge Fowler. You know what that means, John. If anybody has any trouble with the judge it'll be Grimsley, the uncle."

"Steve," said Mrs. Davis, "you've seen the child. Is he a nice child?"

"I guess all kids are nice according to their chances," said Earle. "This one hasn't had any chances."

"The reason I ask," said Mrs. Davis, "is that John and I have talked—have talked—about adopting one. We—we get lonely sometimes—for a child."

Tommy was holding Frank by the collar now. He noticed that it was stifling hot and Frank was panting, that the sunlight on the trees was growing strange in colour, that the trees themselves stood motionless as if the leaves were made out of iron that could not stir, and when he glanced behind him, toward the barn, he saw over the hills a black cloud.

[Pg 235]

Then something in the road drew his attention. A man had ridden up on a horse and was dismounting and coming up the walk. He looked twice before he could make sure. It was Bob Kelley, rural policeman.

He left his hiding place and went running toward the back yard. There was no one there, not even Joe. For a moment his heart stood still. Then he remembered that he and Joe had played in the barn that morning. Maybe Joe was afraid of the cloud and had gone to the barn. He unlatched the lot gate, swung it heavily open, and went into the high, wide hall. Joe was sitting on the ladder that led up into the loft.

"Heh!" said Tommy.

Joe looked at him strangely.

"Guess who's out there now!" cried Tommy, out of breath. "Bob Kelley. He's comin' up the walk!"

"Who's he?"

"Pleasant!"

Joe gasped.

"Cop?"

"Yes, cop!" said Tommy, proud that they had such things in the country as well as in town. "I'll go an' fin' out what he wants. You stay here. I'll come back an' tell you. Come on, F'ank!" [Pg 236]

He did not look back as he ran. He did not stop at the pillar this time. He went right up on the porch. Policemen didn't come to their house every day. Kelley had not sat down.

"That's all right, Bob," Earle was saying. "John or I will look after him till the matter's settled."

Then, said Kelley, he would be going before the storm broke. He went down the steps and down the walk. There was no sun now.

Mrs. Davis rose. She was a stout, motherly woman. She was dressed up as if it were Sunday. Mr. Davis rose, too. You could never tell because of his beard whether he had on a cravat or not.

"I want to see the child, Steve," Mrs. Davis said. Her face was so earnest it almost frightened Tommy. "Oh, I hope I will love him! I could not take a child I did not love. I always thought I wanted one that had been well brought up. I don't know what I would do with the other kind—but if he loves me——"

Steve turned and saw Tommy looking up at them with wide eyes. Frank had lain down in the walk.

"Where have you got your friend stuck away, old man?" asked Steve.

"Out at the barn, Papa. He's skeered."

They all went down the steps. Frank rose and followed, with panting mouth and wagging tail. He was a part of everything they did. This was his place as well as theirs, and he had his share in all that went on. As they turned the corner of the house they came face to face with the black thunder cloud in the west. As if it had seen them, there came from its depths a distant rumble. [Pg 237]

Steve Earle held the lot gate open for Mrs. Davis. It was like holding the gate of life open to that boy in the barn. They went into the wide, lofty hall, lined with stalls. The ladder still led into the loft but there was no one on it.

"Joe!" called Tommy shrilly.

"He's gone up in the loft," said Davis.

Tommy and Mrs. Davis watched the two men climb the ladder. Mrs. Davis was breathing hard, as if some great test was about to be put to her. They heard the men walking about in the rustling hay; they heard Steve Earle calling.

"Joe—Joe—nobody's going to hurt you, son."

Their faces looked worried when they came down. Aunt Cindy had run out to them now. She had been in the front room, listening between the curtains to the conversation on the porch. She had not seen the child.

"He's run off!" screamed Tommy suddenly. "Papa, I tol' him the cop had come."

Aunt Cindy was down on her knees and had caught him to her ample bosom as she had caught him so many times. He choked down the sobs that had begun to rise. With terror he saw that the trees that had been standing so still were now rustling their leaves violently, and that out at the road a cloud of dust was rising. [Pg 238]

Then Frank took charge of things.

He had gone into the barn with them. He had smelled the ladder, the ground, and come out into the lot. While they were searching he had run to them, looked up into their faces, run back out, his nose to the ground, and turned at the entrance to look at them once more, ears pricked. Frank had known from the first. That empty ladder, that straw-carpeted hall, that cleanly kept barn lot, had all the time been telling him something that it didn't tell people. But Frank couldn't talk, so now he took his stand beside Steve Earle and barked. Steve turned quickly.

"I get you, Frank!" he said. "Go find him!"

Gratefully Frank looked up at his master. He ran to the lot fence, and reared up on it, smelling the top of the planks. Then he drew back, gathered himself, and sprang up on the fence. He remained poised for a moment, sprang down, and started across the cotton patch, his nose to the ground.

"You had better stay, Mrs. Davis," said Earle.

"No, I'm going." Her motherly face was set, the wind was whipping her skirt about her.

Aunt Cindy had run to the house and brought her a raincoat. She was going, too, declared the black woman. They all hurried around the lot. In the cottonfield Frank was still waiting. [Pg 239]

"Had we better let Tommy go?" asked Davis.

"He stood up for the kid, John," replied Earle. "He's going to be in at the finish."

Down by the woods Frank was waiting for them now—waiting for these slow-moving bipeds. "This is the way he went," he said plainer than words. "Better than if I had seen him, I know." His long silken ears were blown back by the wind. As they drew nearer they saw the eagerness of his dark eyes. Earle took Tommy by the hand. On the other side, his beard blown against him, hurried Mr. John Davis. Behind came the women.

A quarter of a mile in the woods, dark with the approaching storm, Earle turned a grim face to his neighbour.

"He's making straight for the mill dam, John."

The breath went out of Tommy with terror. That was an awful place, the mill dam! Above it the water was fifteen feet deep, his father said. Below, the water tumbled and foamed over rocks that would beat a man's life out. On top of the dam, raised above the glancing water on stays, a narrow walkway of single planks was laid. Grown men could cross, not boys.

Once, when he had gone with his father to the mill and no one was looking, Tommy had tried to walk out, just a little way. Everything had turned black. He only knew his father was calling him to look up, not down. But he could not take his eyes from the rushing water under his feet. While he was falling, arms had snatched him up. Tommy began to sob as they hurried. [Pg 240]

It was growing darker in the woods. There had been no rain yet, but high up in the trees was a roaring sound, and now and then leaves and dead twigs came whirling down into the quieter regions below.

"Can you see Frank?" asked Earle.

"No. Call him, Steve. We may be off the track."

"I'm afraid to do that, John. If it rains hard, as it's apt to do any minute, he will lose the trail."

"There's nothing else to do!" cried Davis above the wind. "We may be going wrong!"

Earle stopped. His hat had fallen off and he had not paused to pick it up. Tommy had never seen his face as it was now.

"Here, John, take the boy," he said. "I'll run for the dam!"

Just then, sharp and clear above the wind, from the dark wooded bottoms ahead, came a bark—a strange little yelp to be made by so big a dog, but the kind a bird dog makes when he functions as a hound. Tommy saw a smile on his father's face.

"The old dog's treed, John!"

[Pg 241]

Then he started running, Tommy keeping pace.

"Speak to him, Frank!" he called. "Let us hear you talk!"

Again, in answer, through the woods came the shrill, self-conscious yelp, then silence, then the yelp again.

"You wait here, son," said Earle. "Wait for Mrs. Davis and Aunt Cindy. Tell 'em to follow the bark. You know the place, don't you? That's the boy. Come on, John! Speak to us, Frank! Speak to us, old man!"

The two men were looking up into a lofty, tossing tree when Tommy and the women reached them. Above them the trees thrashed back and forth bewilderingly, showing the stormy sky, then covering it over, then showing it again. And there, looking up into the tree also, eyes shining, tongue hanging out, sides heaving, was old Frank. Once he reared up on the trunk of the tree as if to make sure again. He whiffed the bark, his tail wagging. Then he jumped down and looked up once more.

Earle's voice was strangely quiet when he spoke.

"I see him," he said. They all crowded about. "My God—he's way out at the end of the top limb. If his head swims——" He began to talk loud, his face still raised. "Joe, listen, old man. We are all your friends down here. Tommy's here."

Davis had sat down on the ground and was hurriedly pulling off his shoes. His beard fell down over his shirt and his hands were trembling. [Pg 242]

"It won't do, John," spoke Steve Earle, and Tommy, aghast, saw the look on his father's face. "The limb he's on will never hold you. He might try to get farther out, and if he does——"

Then, as calmly as she could, Mrs. Davis called to the boy, pleading with him to come down, telling him that she would be his mother, not knowing, anxious, excited woman that she was, that the word probably meant nothing to that child tossing up there in mid-air.

And now for the first time Tommy's straining eyes saw—saw the white face, the little body pressed against the swaying limb, saw the frantic arms clinging to the lofty perch, saw the whole tree moving dizzily back and forth against the stormy sky, as if in the hands of a giant who was trying to shake that tiny figure down.

The voice of the boy rang out shrill and clear above the tumult of the wind and the tearing leaves.

"Joe! You hear me, Joe, don't you?" The voice was quiet and sure now, the nerves of the man that was to be had steadied. Only grammar went all to pieces; it had been deteriorating these last twenty-four hours. A boy's grammar is a structure always ready to tumble, like a house of cards.

"They ain't no cop down here, Joe. We done sent him home. He's gone, Joe, honest he has. You know me, Joe. I wouldn't tell you no lie!"

Now the figure up there stirred. A small bare foot felt down and reached uncertainly, as if blown about by the wind, for a lower branch; a small hand that had clung to a glass of milk now clung to a limb above his head. Then Tommy saw that his father, with upraised face, was standing directly under that figure up there in the angry foliage. [Pg 243]

"Steady, Joe, old scout!" said Earle.

"Don't talk to him, Papa," pleaded Tommy.

"He's right, Steve," spoke Mrs. Davis.

But once after this Tommy spoke.

"Joe! Try that un on the other side!"

Again they watched the foot feeling about. Again it found the limb. Once they saw him, like a bear cub, hug the trunk. Once he slid and fragments of bark came tumbling down. Closer to earth drew the small figure. They could hear the calloused little bare feet scraping the bark. Then, all of a sudden, Steve Earle had swung himself up by the lower branches. His strong arms reached upward and were lowered down to them, and from his fingers a gasping little figure slid to the ground.

It was still light enough to see the face. The grin with which he had started out in life to brave an unfriendly world was gone, and in its place was terror—terror of those awful heights, of that swaying tree, of night and storm, and now of these faces about him. The sturdy chest was rising and falling. He looked pitifully small, like a baby.

There came a blinding flash of lightning, and a clap of thunder that seemed to burst the woods open. In the momentary flash they saw his white face and dilated eyes. [Pg 244]

Mrs. Davis had sunk to her knees, arms outstretched.

"Darling!" she cried. Tommy had heard his mother say it that way. Then he turned his head in a sort of embarrassment, for Joe had run into Mrs. Davis's arms, and Joe was sobbing on Mrs. Davis's ample bosom; and no gentleman, big or small, likes to witness his friend's emotions.

"I guess it's a go, Steve," said John Davis.

"Looks like it, John," replied Steve.

And then the rain that had held back so long came down through the forest in a deluge.

XI

[Pg 245]

BLOOD MONEY

"A man," says Poor Richard, "has three friends—an old wife, an old dog, and money." Now two of these friends Jim Taylor had. He had an old wife and he had an old dog, but he had no money. And there are times when, let comfortable moralists say what they please, a man's need for money overshadows everything else. Such a time had come to Jim Taylor.

It came at one o'clock on a cold, starry March morning. Since sundown he and the veterinarian from Breton Junction had been working out in the lot by the light of a lantern. Since sundown Mary, his wife, had hurried back and forth from the kitchen with pots of hot water.

"Better go to bed now, gal," he had said over and over. But she had not gone.

Since sundown, also, old Prince, his big white Llewellyn setter, had hung about within the circle of light cast by the lantern. He had followed Mary to the kitchen and back, as if she needed a protector. He had gone with Jim to the well after water. While Jim and the doctor worked, he had sat gravely on his haunches, looking solemnly on. Now the veterinarian had driven away, and old [Pg 246]

Jim, long, lank, a bit stooped, stood in the middle of the lot, Mary on one side, Prince on the other. Before him lay his mule, dead.

Now a mule is mortal, and a dead one not uncommon. But on this particular mule Jim had depended for his cotton crop. And on his cotton crop he had depended for money to pay off the mortgage on his farm—the farm that represented his and Mary's belated plunge in life.

Perhaps to say Mary's plunge would be nearer the truth. But for her, Jim would have remained an easy-going renter all his days, with a bird dog before the fire and a shotgun over the mantel and fishing poles out under the shed. His was the lore of field and stream, not of business. It was Mary who, two years before, had seen in the advancing price of cotton their chance to own a farm. She had talked him into trying to make terms with Old Man Thornycroft, his landlord.

"All right, gal," he had said one morning; "here goes."

He had come back with a new light in his gray, twinkling sportsman's eyes. He had got right down to work. The sound of his hammer as he patched barn and sheds had taken the place of the sound of his shotgun in the woods. He had followed the furrow as earnestly as if it were a wild-turkey track in the swamp, while old Prince, that mighty hunter, looked on bewildered. He had raised good crops. He had met his first payments. Then had come the great war and thirty-cent cotton and the chance to pay out. He had redoubled his efforts. He had borrowed to the limit on the coming season's prospects. He had bought ample fertilizer, a new wagon, a new plough. And now the mule, without which all these things were useless, lay at his feet a mass of worse than useless flesh.

[Pg 247]

The shivering voice of Mary at his side—he hadn't realized before how cold it was—roused him from his melancholy contemplation of the spectacle.

"What're we goin' to do now, Jim?"

"Oh, we'll manage somehow," he declared.

He picked up the lantern, looked down into her face, and his eyes twinkled momentarily.

"That mule was lazy, anyhow."

But there was no answering twinkle in Mary's eyes as they turned back toward the house. They left the lot gate open, no need to close it now, and old Prince followed with subdued mien at their heels; their troubles were his troubles, and, besides, he had rather liked the mule in a condescending sort of way.

"How much will a new mule cost?" Mary asked as they went up the steps, their footfalls sounding loud in the dead silence down there under the stars.

"Well, two hundred dollars will get one you won't have to prop up betwixt the traces."

[Pg 248]

He did not see the sudden eagerness in her face. He pushed the door open for her.

"Come in, old man," he said to Prince. "You done the best you could."

In the unceiled kitchen he set the lantern down on the table. "Don't you bother, gal," he said to Mary. "You look all wore out. Go to bed now and get some sleep. I'll go to Greenville to-morrow and see if I can't borrow the money."

But next day in town Jim found, as he had been afraid he would find, that it is not easy for a man known primarily as a hunter and fisherman to borrow two hundred dollars. He had not even gone to see Thornycroft. The old man would be glad enough of an opportunity to get the improved place back; Jim knew that.

But he did call on the banks. They were sorry, cashiers explained courteously after they had questioned him briefly through barred windows. But right at this particular time their customers had use for all the money they could get their hands on, and—

"You think you've got it," he said to Mary that night before the fire, "till you come out in the street and feel in your pockets. Then you know you ain't."

"But, Jim—what're you goin' to do now?"

"I'll bait another hook, Mary," he said, trying to conceal the growing anxiety he felt.

[Pg 249]

Old Prince went joyfully with him when next morning early he set out on foot to call on the few farmers he knew who might have money to lend; Prince always went when Jim was afoot. The sun rose on them when, a mile up the road, they came in sight of the Northern Hunt Club. It shone ruddily on the bare oaks and the columned porticos, and the white stables and kennels in the rear.

Jim never saw the place without a touch of grave reminiscence. Here used to come old Doctor Tolman from New York, to attend the field trials and to hunt, and Jim had been his hunting companion. On just such mornings as this he would join the doctor out here in the road. Before those stone gate posts that marked the entrance to the grounds they had had their last talk, eight years ago.

"Don't know when I'll get back, Jim," the doctor had said. "I can't tramp around as I used to, and

my practice gets heavier instead of easing up. I want to say this, Jim: I've hunted with many a man, but you're the best sport I ever went into the fields with. I'm going to send you a pup. Call him 'Prince' if you want to. He's got a pedigree like a king—goes back to the old country. He's good enough for you, and you're good enough for him."

That winter, just before the news came of the doctor's death, Prince had arrived at Breton Junction by express; a roly-poly puppy done up in a crate and scared to death. Jim had reared him tenderly, taught him while he was still a pup to retrieve and stand steady in the yard, taken him into the fields when he was old enough, shown him what was necessary, and left the rest to instinct. Season after season he had watched the dog gain in wisdom and steadfastness. Now they understood one another as only hunting man and hunting dog, who have been intimately associated for years, can understand. Together they passed the club, old Prince running contentedly ahead.

[Pg 250]

They were gone all day. First Jim called on Steve Earle, then on Squire Kirby. Both lived seven miles away, but they were his best chance. The Squire and his wife had gone to visit their children and would not be back till Christmas. Steve Earle had left the day before for New York on business.

He did not mention his troubles to Steve Earle's wife. He was not the man to parade his perplexities before a woman. He turned back toward the section where lived small farmers, like himself. It was dusk when he returned home, Prince trotting with dejected tail at his heels, for Prince had seen the troubled look in his master's eyes. One farmer after another had turned Jim down. The country was poor, for one thing. But for Kirby and Earle there were no large planters in it; and in this day of high-priced cotton each small farmer was straining every nerve to better his own fortunes.

[Pg 251]

"I'd like to, Jim," they had said, "but——"

"Oh, that's all right," Jim had replied.

He answered Mary's questions cheerfully enough. She had stuck to him through thick and thin, mostly thin, he reckoned, and he was going to stick to her. This farm was her gamble, and he was going to see it through for her. But in the silence of the night, unknown to her, he fought one of the hardest battles of his life, a battle that kept him awake and drenched him with perspiration. For he was a hunter, was Jim, and old Prince was his dog.

He arose with grave face to greet another day. While Mary was in the kitchen getting breakfast, he rummaged secretly among his queer assortment of papers—gun catalogues, directions about building a boat, advertisements of shotgun shells with hunting dogs painted on them. At last he found it—Prince's pedigree that Doctor Tolman had sent along with Prince. He folded it carefully, stuck it in his pocket, and replaced the other papers.

He was going to see some men at the club, he told Mary at breakfast. He might take a little round. She could look for him when she saw him. She insisted on putting up a lunch for him. She saw him getting back before night, she laughed, when he protested. She came out on the porch with him and patted him on the back when he went down the steps in his patched old hunting coat, his gun stuck under his arm.

[Pg 252]

He went up the road in his long, lurching, huntsman's stride. Old Prince raced ahead, then back to him, barking with joy, leaping into his face like the athlete he was, his eyes almost fierce with eagerness. On every side frost-sparkling strawfields, horizoned by pine woods, shimmered in the sun. The air came fresh like cold spring water. Hundreds of times before on such mornings he and Prince had set out this way. Hundreds of times they had come home in the gloaming, Prince trotting behind, Jim's hunting coat bulging with birds.

But this was to be no such hunt. A mile up the road he called the old setter to him. Prince came in with drooped ears and upraised, bewildered eyes. That was what hurt. That was what was going to hurt more and more—that Prince would never understand.

They turned in between the stone gate posts of the club and up the walk toward the white columns of the portico. Jim remembered a picture in Martha's Bible of an old high priest going to an altar with a sheep following behind. This was his place of sacrifice, and old Prince, suddenly subdued, was trotting at his heels.

The butler answered his knock at the door. Why, yes, he said in answer to Jim's question, there was a man upstairs named Gordon. He was a great dog man; he owned kennels up in Jersey. He just got in last night—down for the field trials and a few days' shooting before going to South America. Some big after-the-war business. He would call Mr. Gordon.

[Pg 253]

Jim waited anxiously on the porch, twisting his scraggly gray moustache and biting the ends. Beside him stood old Prince, looking up into his grave face. At last the man came out, bareheaded—tall, ruddy, clean-cut, a sportsman every inch. Jim would have spotted him in a crowd and he would have spotted Jim—soul mates, as it were. The quick glance he gave old Prince was full of admiration.

"What's his name?"

"Prince."

The man looked down appraisingly at the long, straight line of the back, the white, wavy, silken hair, that glistened like satin in the sun, the noble dome of the head with its one lemon-coloured ear, the intelligence, courage, and high breeding in the upraised, fearless eyes.

"Where did you get him?"

Jim told him.

"Why, I knew Doctor Tolman well. A fine old gentleman. Gordon's my name. Mr. Taylor, I'm glad to meet you. You know, I like the looks of Prince here. He is—well, there are not many like him. Did Doctor Tolman leave any record of his pedigree?"

Jim's hand trembled a bit as he reached in his pocket. It was almost with regret that he saw the unmistakable pleasure in Gordon's eyes as he glanced quickly down the record that told why Prince was what he was.

[Pg 254]

"I tell you what I'll do," said Gordon, handing the paper back, "I'll get on my hunting things and we'll take a little round—just you and I and Prince. Won't you come in?"

Jim shook his head. While Gordon was gone he sat down on the stone steps, his gun between his knees. Yonder lay the sunlit country he and Prince knew so well. Prince came to him and laid his head on his knee. He knew when a man was in trouble, did Prince.

All day they hunted through a country of distant prospects, a country that rolled like the sea, a country brown with broomstraw fields, green with pine woods, gray with patches of bare winter oaks. Back and forth ahead, sometimes so far they could hardly make him out, again so close they could hear the pant of his breath, swept old Prince.

Sometimes they saw him stop short, a mere speck of white against a distant hill. Again in creek bottoms, in the edges of woods, they found him, erect, motionless, tail straight out, a living, breathing statue in white. They advanced side by side; the staccato of their shots rang out in the amber air; out of whirling coveys birds tumbled. And always here came old Prince to them, bird in mouth, ears thrown back, fine old eyes aglow with a sportsman's joy.

[Pg 255]

Not even Prince himself had ever done more brilliant work. He didn't know that every covey he found, every bird he retrieved, was setting a price as it were on his head, dooming him in his old age to exile under a strange master in a strange land. But Jim knew, watching with sinking heart the admiration in Gordon's eyes.

They ate Mary's lunch on a log in the woods, sitting side by side in the democracy of the out of doors. They talked about hunting and dogs. They took turns tossing biscuit to hungry old Prince, who sat at a distance like the gentleman he was, and who caught them skillfully, then lay down to eat them, his tail dragging gratefully across the dead leaves.

At last they rose from the log. Old Prince sprang to his feet, ears pricked, eyes shining. A wave of Jim's hand and he was off in his strong, steady gallop to new conquests. Their shots rang out in other fields and woods. The sun dropped closer to the horizon. The shadows crept farther out into the fields and deeper into the spirit of Jim Taylor.

It was early dusk when they stood in front of the stone gate posts of the club, and Gordon spoke about it at last.

"Are you sure you want to sell him, Taylor?"

[Pg 256]

Jim swallowed. "That's what I come for, Mr. Gordon."

"Well, I think two hundred and fifty would be a fair price at his age."

"That's fair enough," said Jim.

"All right. Come in and we'll fix it up."

They went up the walk together in silence and around the club to the kennels. Close to his master's heels trotted old Prince, tired now, eyes turned longingly down the road toward his home and his fire.

"You can chain him there," said Gordon.

"Here?" asked Jim, for things seemed suddenly to be swimming around.

"Yes—to that kennel. That's it. Now we'll go inside."

Jim knew he was in the wide hall before the fire, that he was shaking hands with two or three men Gordon introduced him to, that he was upstairs in Gordon's room, that Gordon had counted out twenty-odd crisp bills on the table. But all these things were confused and blurred in his mind. For out there as he turned away old Prince had looked at him with drooped ears, and pleading eyes that for the first time in their long relationship did not understand.

Gordon came downstairs with him. He was looking for a telegram calling him away any hour now, he said. Old Prince would be well taken care of while he was gone. He had an old groom who was a wizard with dogs. Out on the porch they shook hands. In the growing darkness Jim trudged, solitary, home. His problem was solved; Mary's home was saved. But in front of that kennel Prince would be waiting for him to come back; and as long as he lived, wherever he went, Prince

[Pg 257]

would still be waiting for him to come back. It was a faithful friend he had sold, one that would have died for him. It was blood money that crackled in his pocket. Mary was cooking supper when he appeared, solitary and gaunt, in the kitchen. Old Prince was going to see something of the world now, he explained.

"Why, Jim!" she cried. "If you had only told me!"

She came to him and caught him by both shoulders. She looked up pityingly into his face.

"Poor old Jim—why didn't you tell me?"

"Oh, well, there wasn't any use, Mary. Mr. Gordon knows how to treat a dog like Prince. I didn't mind much."

So he spoke, boldly, in the kitchen. But as he went about his work in the yard he missed the silent companionship of Prince at his heels. As he ate supper, his eyes from force of habit wandered over the table for scraps of food for Prince. While he sat smoking his pipe before the bedroom fire he tried resolutely not to look at the empty rug in front of the hearth. And when later he went out to draw water the yard was desolate, and the moon risen over the fields looked at him in solemn reproach.

[Pg 258]

Next day he rode to Greenville with Tom Jennings, a neighbouring farmer, and bought a mule. They had passed the club before sunrise, sitting side by side on the wagon seat in the cold morning air. No sound had come from those white kennels which he could make out dimly in the back yard like tombstones. Old Prince was not the kind of dog to whine or howl.

But all that morning while he went from one sales stable to another Jim knew Prince would be pricking his ears at every footstep around the club, and scanning every approaching face with hopeful, eager eyes. He had known some bird dogs who were the property of any hunter who chanced along with a gun, and others that stuck to one man, and one man alone. Prince was a one man's dog.

He left town in the afternoon, sitting on a box in the rear of Jennings's wagon, leading the mule by a halter. Before sunset they came to the country where he and Prince had hunted a hundred times. On top of that steep hill, yonder by that dead pine, Prince had held a covey an hour one stormy day in a gale of wind that threatened to blow him off his feet.

Into this swift creek, over whose bridge the wagon wheels rumbled, Prince had plunged one icy morning and retrieved a wounded bird, the water freezing on him as he stepped dripping out. These things and others like them, in spite of himself, passed, along with the slowly passing landscape, through the mind of Jim Taylor while the sun dropped low over the hills and Tom Jennings talked about what a bargain the mule was, and the mule pulled back, as mules always do, on the halter.

[Pg 259]

It was nearly dusk when they came in sight of the club, whose lights twinkled through the trees, and Jennings spoke up suddenly:

"Hello! Ain't that your wife yonder?"

Jim glanced around. "Looks like her, Tom."

"She just left the club."

"Been to sell eggs, likely."

But when they caught up with her Jim saw that she was in her best black dress with the black beaded bonnet, and when he helped her in the wagon he noticed that her face was worried. She did not even seem to observe the mule; and Jim, as he led his sleek new purchase to the barn, was wondering what it all meant.

He was still wondering while he finished his lonely work about the yard. As he stamped up the back steps he saw her through the kitchen window rise suddenly from a chair. She had changed her dress, but she had not started the fire or lit the lamp. He must have surprised her.

Oh, she was just tired, she said in reply to his anxious question. She had been to the club to sell eggs.

[Pg 260]

"They must have been mighty fine eggs," he said, his eyes twinkling kindly, "for you to dress up so. You must have toted 'em in your hands, too, for you forgot your basket."

She sank into a chair, looking up helplessly at him.

"Sit down, Jim," she said. Then she went on: "I never meant to tell you, Jim. I tried—I tried to buy him back."

"Buy him?"

"Yes, old Prince."

"Why, Mary, I thought I told you—he give me two hundred and fifty dollars."

"I know. I offered him what he gave."

"You—you done what?"

She smiled a little at the amazement in his face, but her voice trembled as she made her confession. For ten years she had been saving up on chickens and eggs, a quarter here, a half-dollar there. In secret she had dreamed and planned. They would have new furniture, she had thought, when the house was theirs—new furniture and a parlour. She had meant to surprise him, not to let him know till it came. She had the furniture picked out in a catalogue.

"Jim," she concluded, "I've saved up two hundred and fifty-four dollars and twenty cents!"

His arm was about her shoulders. "Poor gal," he said. "She would have give it all up for me and Prince. Now, now—don't cry. It's all the same—you tried." [Pg 261]

She wiped her eyes on her apron and looked at him.

"I saw last night how hard hit you was. I never knew till then just how much store you set on Prince. And I never knew how much I thought of him, for what you love, I love. I made up my mind then, Jim. After dinner I went to the club. I had to wait a long time, for he was out hunting. When he came in I told him I'd give him what he gave you, and four dollars more. Jim, I thought he understood, he looked so kind. He made me set down there in the big room. Then, Jim, I told him—told him how it was with us."

Jim's face grew suddenly stern. "You told him that?"

She nodded.

"And he turned you down?"

"Oh, he was nice enough, as nice as if I was his mother. He came out on the porch with me; he wanted to send me home. But he said he didn't feel like selling him—selling old Prince; that it was a bargain between you and him. Jim, when he turned back, I went round the club house. He was chained to a kennel. He knew me, Jim. He thought I had come after him!"

She was crying outright now, there beside her cold stove, and wiping her eyes on her apron.

"Well," said Jim solemnly, "I've hunted with many a man. I never knew one to be white in the field and black outside before." [Pg 262]

They ate a silent supper. They went into the bedroom before the fire. Above the mantel was a picture of a dog pointing, over the bed another of a dog retrieving. And in Jim's mind was another of old Prince sitting off at a distance like the gentleman he was, and a man on the log at his own side eating Mary's lunch.

"God Almighty!" he said to himself.

Out in the night came the roar of the Florida Limited. It whistled once long and melodiously, then twice in short staccatos. That meant passengers for the club or passengers from the club for the train. Maybe, right now, old Prince was waiting on the station platform in the glare of the headlight, wondering what it all meant. Maybe by to-morrow he would be hundreds of miles away.

Jim rose, picked up the bucket, and stepped out into the cold moonlight. Even on a little trip like this Prince had always come with him. He could imagine he saw him now, sitting on his haunches out there in the yard, waiting for the water to be drawn. He had comforted himself with the thought that Gordon would be kind to Prince, and now—

"A man that would treat a woman like that," he said bitterly, "would kick a dog!"

He turned back to the house, his head bowed. As he went up the steps he seemed to hear up the misty moonlit road that led to the club a faint tinkle like that made by a running dog's collar. He stood listening for a moment. The ghost of a sound had ceased. He went inside and closed the door behind him. [Pg 263]

Mary sat by the fire above the empty rug, her chin in her hand. He placed the bucket on the stand and washed his face, smoothing back with a big wet hand his heavy, iron-gray hair. He sat down and began to undress in silence. He had taken off one shoe when he heard it again—the tinkle, unmistakable this time, of a running dog's collar.

"What's that, Jim?" demanded Mary.

But he was already on his feet and halfway down the hall, Mary close behind him.

"It's him!" he said grimly. "He run away!"

He threw the door open. Big, white, with shining eyes, old Prince was jumping all over him, jumping up into his face, and into the face of Mary. They turned back to the fire. He was running round and round the room, looking at them over the table, his tail beating chair rungs and bedstead. He was frantic with joy; his eyes were aglow with happiness, the happiness of a dog that has come home.

"Get my hat, Mary."

"Why, Jim?"

"It was blood money bought him but I've got to take him back."

She pleaded with him. There was her money. Maybe he would take it now.

[Pg 264]

But Jim's face was set. "He turned you down once, gal. He'll never have another chance!"

She brought him his hat, her face white.

"Come on, old man," he said, and started for the door.

But Prince hung back, ears drooped, eyes pleading.

"Come on, sir!"

He pretended not to understand. He sat down on his haunches. He lay down humbly on the floor, head between his paws, tail dragging contritely across the rag rug. He showed decided symptoms of an intention to crawl under the bed, and Jim started grimly toward him. Then it was that Mary saw.

"Hold on, Jim! What's this on him?"

She was down on the floor with the dog. She jerked something off his collar.

"Light the lamp, Jim!" she cried.

With trembling hands he obeyed. She had risen now, so had Prince. He had taken refuge behind her skirts, from which point of vantage he was looking round her up into the face of his master. The light Jim held over her shoulder showed writing on a piece of paper.

"Jim!" she cried, all out of breath, "Jim! It says: 'Compliments of Mr. Gordon to Mrs. Taylor. You see, I couldn't sell him to you, but I want you two to have him. I am leaving in a few minutes. No time for more. The train is coming.'" [Pg 265]

Jim set the lamp on the table. "Well, well!" he said and sank into a chair. Before him the fire roared and crackled up the chimney. Prince's head was on his knee. He saw a man sitting on a log beside him in the woods. He looked into the man's clear sportsman's eyes.

Far in the north through the stillness of the night he heard the faint, vanishing whistle of the Limited. He put his hand on Prince's silken head, and Prince nestled close and sat down on his haunches. Jim's arm was about the shoulders of Mary, who had knelt down beside him.

"Well, well!" he said again, and the fire grew dim and blurred before his eyes.

XII

[Pg 266]

THE CALL OF HOME

Old Frank, Irish setter, crawled out of his clean warm kennel underneath the back porch; stretched his long, keen muscles till they cracked; yawned with a fog of frosted breath at the misty winter sun risen over distant mountains; then trotted around the side of the big white house called Freedom Hill—the house that was his master's home and his own.

As if a happy thought had struck him, he broke into a sudden burst of speed. He ran up the front steps three at a bound. He scratched at the side front doors with the fan-shaped transom above. He waited with ears pricked and wagging tail, nose to the crack of the door.

For it was always interesting to speculate on who would open the doors on this particular morning. Maybe it would be the master, Steve Earle, maybe the mistress, Marian Earle, maybe the boy Tommy—maybe old Aunt Cindy the cook. If it were the old black woman she would grumble. She would declare she didn't have time to bother with a dog while her breakfast waited on the stove. She would remind him that he was only a dog. But she would let him in, for all that. [Pg 267]

He scratched again. He didn't like to be kept expectant; he grew excited when he had to wait. He had worn a place on the door where he scratched. Suddenly he turned his head sideways, intently listening, for someone had opened the living-room door. He began to pant, and his eyes glowed with gratitude. That step coming down the hall—he would know it anywhere. He could hardly wait now.

The door opened and he looked up past broad shoulders into kindly gray eyes. His ears flattened with reverence, even while his eyes shone with comradeship.

"Come in, old man," said Steve Earle—he always said just that.

Frank stopped before the living-room door, and looked up at his master. He had to depend on human beings in matters like the opening of doors. And now he was in the living room, where a fire of oak logs roared up the chimney. Overwhelming joy seized him that he should be in here. He ran to Marian Earle and laid his head on her lap, looking up into her face; then to Tommy Earle, the boy, who caught hold of his heavy red mane. They were all smiling at him.

He grew embarrassed and poked his head against the shirt bosom of the boy. He sat down before his mistress and raised his paw to shake hands. He wanted to show them in some way that he [Pg 268]

was grateful for all this. Then he looked around the room and his long silken-red ears drooped.

For this morning was different from other mornings. People were looking down at him in a different way. Not only that, but Lancaster, his master's friend who lived in New York and who had driven out unexpectedly yesterday from Breton Junction, stood before the fire, overcoat over his arm, satchel at his feet. Then he saw on the table his collar and chain. And now old Frank knew—knew he was going on a journey.

But more than that he knew, for his was the wisdom of the seasoned bird dog. Steve Earle's overcoat hung on the hat rack in the hall. His favourite gun was over yonder in the corner, the hunting coat draped over it. Steve Earle was not going.

It was this that made him look with vaguely troubled eyes into the faces of master and mistress and boy. It was this which filled him with foreboding.

"I don't believe," Lancaster was smiling down at him, "I don't believe he's very keen about going, Steve."

"Oh, Frank'll be all right," laughed Earle. "He's a good scout. Just had a sort of exiled feeling for a moment. He's a countryman like the rest of us. He doesn't like to leave home. I'm glad for him to go. He'll see something of the world."

[Pg 269]

So spoke Steve Earle, the master. But out in the spacious kitchen, hung with pots and pans, where his mistress and Tommy put his pot of breakfast before him and watched while he ate—out in the kitchen old Aunt Cindy, the cook, raised her voice in protest.

"Ain't dey got no dogs up in New York whar dat man come from?" she demanded. "Why don't he have a dog of his own, den? He rich enough to buy a dozen. What he want to stop over here an' borry *our* dog for? What he gwine to take him to, Miss Marian? Fluridy, you say? Lordy, lordy, dat a long way to take our dog, a powerful long way!"

"But he's goin' to bring him back, though!" cried Tommy.

"Well, honey, I don't know about dat. You never can tell. Dis here's Friday, an' Friday a bad luck day. Sometimes folks, an' dogs, too, set out on Friday, an' never do come back. Lordy, lordy, ain't I see things like dat happen?"

Marian laughed.

"Don't scare the child, Aunt Cindy."

"I ain't skeerin' the chile, Miss Marian. I mean ev'y word I say, Miss. Friday a bad day to start anywhere—a powerful bad day!"

And she went on wiping dishes and shaking her turbaned head.

It was winter when Steve Earle and Lancaster lifted Frank, without protest on his part, into the baggage car at Breton Junction. It was summer in the strange flat country where after two days and a night of travel Lancaster lifted him, rejoicing in his freedom, out again. It was old Frank's staunchness that brought calamity upon him. But that is going ahead.

[Pg 270]

There had been three days of great shooting. The exiled feeling had left him, and he and Lancaster had become comrades. Lancaster was a good shot and that commanded his respect. Lancaster was a kind man and that commanded his affection. At the lodge in the pines where they lived were other men, hunters like Lancaster, and other dogs, bird dogs like himself, a congenial crowd, sportsmen all.

Sometimes as he lay in the lodge, where if the night was cool a fire was built, and while he listened to the talk and laughter of the men, he thought of home—gravely, without repining, as a mature and self-sufficient man does. Lancaster would take him back, that he knew. If any doubts assailed him, a look into Lancaster's face and into the faces of the other men dispelled them. These men were like his master—men on whom a dog can depend.

On the morning of the fourth day Lancaster took him out alone, with only a guide. Barking with joy, he leaped up into the face of his friend; then started out on his swift strong gallop through the level fields of broomstraw. In his eagerness to find birds he rounded a swamp. A wide, free ranger, he drew quickly out of sight. In a clearing engirt by pines he stopped abruptly—stopped just in time. Right before him, his nose told him, were birds.

[Pg 271]

He stiffened into an earnest, beautiful point. He would not stir until Lancaster came up behind him and ordered him on. And Lancaster with the guide was far behind and on the other side of the swamp.

A fine sight he made in that lonely country, standing, head erect, tail straight out, sun flashing on his silken red hair. So those two men, driving in a dilapidated wagon along a sandy road in the edge of the pines, must have thought. For the driver, a burly, sallow fellow, pointed him out, pulled on the reins, and the wagon stopped. The two talked for a while in guarded tones; next they stood up on the wagon seat and looked all around; then they climbed out and came stealthily across the field. The burly man held in his hand a rope.

Instinct alarmed the dog, warned him to turn. Professional pride held him rigid, lest he flush those birds and be disgraced. Pride betrayed him. A sudden grip cut his hind legs from under

him, threw him flat on his back just as the birds rose with a roar. A thumb and forefinger, clamped in his mouth, pressed on his nose like a vise. He was squirming powerfully in the sand, but a knee was on his throat and the sky was growing black.

[Pg 272]

Writhing and twisting, he was lifted to the wagon and tied in the bottom with ropes. Then pine trees were passing swiftly overhead. One man was lashing the mule. The other was standing up, looking back.

"See anybody?"

"No."

"Reckon he's one of them thousand-dollar dogs, Jim?"

"Reckon so! Look at him!"

All day the wagon wheels ground the sand. All day old Frank, tied in the bottom of the wagon, sullenly watched those two men in the seat. Once or twice, at the sound of other wheels approaching along the unfrequented road, they pulled aside into the woods and waited. At dusk they turned into a dirty yard. On the porch of an unpainted shack stood a woman, beyond stretched level fields of broomstraw, then the flat blue line of forest, and above the forest a dark-red glow.

They unfastened all the ropes but the one about his neck, pulled him out of the wagon, dragged him off to the log corncrib, shoved him in, untied the rope, and bolted the door. Then the burly man shoved in a pone of cornbread and a pan of water.

"You go to town to-morrow, Sam," he said as he rebolted the door. "Just hang around and listen. See if there's any reward in the paper—big red Irish setter. His owner might telegraph the paper to-night. Sooner we make the deal, the better."

[Pg 273]

Inside the crib the captive stood listening with shrewdly pricked ears while the mumble of voices died away toward the shack, steps stamped up on the porch, and the door slammed. Then he went cautiously round his prison, whiffing the sides, rearing up on the log walls. Across the rear corner was a pile of boxes. He climbed up on them. They rattled and he jumped quickly down.

But later, after all sound had ceased in the shack and the lights he had been watching through a chink in the logs had gone out, he climbed carefully over behind these boxes. There was space to stand in back here; the floor was of broad boards. Through the cracks he could see that the crib was set up off the ground.

He began to scratch the corner board, then to gnaw. All night long at intervals he sounded like a big rat in a barn. Sometimes he rested, panting hard, then went back to work.

At the first sound of movement in the shack next morning he leaped back over the boxes, and when the burly man opened the door to shove in bread and water he lay in the middle of the floor and looked upon his captor with sullen dignity.

That night he gnawed, and the next. But the surface of the board offered little hold for claws or teeth. Industry, patience, a good cause, do not make boards less hard, nails less maddening. He saw the third day dawn, he heard steps stumping about in the shack, he saw the other man ride into the dirty yard, and he sank down panting on his prison floor, his head between his paws, dismay in his heart.

[Pg 274]

They brought him his breakfast and there was talk before his prison.

"Two hundred dollars, hell!" said the burly man. "Is that all they're offering? They'll give a thousand but what they'll git that dog!"

"Well," said the other, "I told Fred to watch the papers, and if the reward went up to send us one. You goin' to keep him stopped up in thar?"

"No. I'm goin' to hunt him—over 'bout the swamps where nobody's apt to see him. Then s'pose questions is asked? We don't read no papers. We just found a lost dog and took care of him—see?"

"S'pose he sneaks off on a hunt?"

"Don't let him. If he tries to git out of sight, fill him full of shot."

"The whole thing's risky, Jim."

"Well, what is it ain't risky?"

Old Frank had always associated with gentlemen, hunted with sportsmen. Now he was to find what it means to be threatened, browbeaten, harassed in his work by inferiors.

On the first hunt, as soon as he got out in the field, he was yelled at. He turned in bewilderment. The men hunted on mules, their guns across the pommels of their saddles, and now they were gesticulating angrily for him to come in. He ran to them, looking up into their faces with apologetic eyes, for, however scornful he might be of them in his prison, in the field his professional reputation, his bird-dog honour, were at stake.

[Pg 275]

"You hunt close!" ordered the burly man.

After that he tried shrewdly to get away, to manoeuvre out of sight under pretext of smelling birds. But the burly man called him in, got down off his mule, cut a big stick, and threatened him. Again, an enraged yell full of danger made him turn to find both guns pointed straight at him and the face of the burly man crimson. He came in, tail tucked, ears thrown back, eyes wild.

"You look here, Jim," said the man called Sam, "you better be satisfied. They're offering four hundred dollars now, and that looks good to me. It's been more'n a week. They ain't goin' to raise it any higher."

"They'll give a thousand!" yelled the burly man.

"All right, Jim—I've warned you!"

Day after day they hunted over the same ground, along the border of a great swamp, where there were no houses, no roads, no cultivated fields. Day after day they grew watchful, until he was almost afraid to get out of the shadows cast by the mule. His tail that he had always carried so proudly began to droop, the gallop that used to carry him swiftly over fields and hills and woodland gave way to a spiritless trot. Fields and woods stretched all about him, the sky was overhead; but he was tied to these ragged men on mules as if by an invisible rope, which to break meant death.

[Pg 276]

At intervals during the silent nights he still gnawed at his board behind the boxes, but he could not hunt all day and stay awake at night. Sheer weariness of body and spirit made him welcome any rest, even that of his hard prison floor. And there were times when it seemed that he had never known any life but the one he was living now.

At first he had expected Lancaster to find him. He had thought of the men about the fireplace of the lodge. They would not desert him. Then as time passed he forgot them. Only a small part of his life had they ever filled. His master and mistress and the boy, his home far away in another world—more and more these filled his thoughts and his desires.

Thus sometimes after a hunt, as he lay on the few shucks he had scratched together into a meagre bed, there came to him from the shack the smell of cooking meat; and he saw a big warm kitchen with a cat dozing by the stove, and a fat old negro mammy bending over steaming kettles and sputtering skillets. Then hungry saliva dripped from his mouth to the floor and he choked and swallowed.

[Pg 277]

Again, on chilly nights, when he glimpsed through the chinks a glow in the windows of the shack, there came into his mind a roaring fire of oak logs and a big living room, with a man and a woman and a little boy around the fire, and a gun standing in the corner with a hunting coat draped over it. Then he raised his big head and looked about his prison with eyes that glowed in the dark. It was at these times that he leaped over the boxes and began to gnaw fiercely at his board.

But maybe even old Frank's stout spirit would have broken, for hope deferred makes the heart of a dog, as well as the heart of man, sick; maybe he would have ceased to gnaw at his board behind the boxes; maybe he would have yielded to the men at last, submissive in spirit as well as in act, if he had not seen the train and the woman and the little boy.

They had taken an unusually long hunt, out of their accustomed course. He had managed to get some distance ahead, pretending not to hear the shouts above the wind; the bird shot they had sent after him had only stung his rump, bringing from him a little involuntary yelp, but not causing him to turn. The wildness of the day had infected him. A high wind blowing out of a sunny, cloudless sky ran in waves over the tawny level fields of broomstraw, and from a body of pines to his right rose a great shouting roar.

[Pg 278]

Suddenly out of the south a whistle came screaming melodiously on the wind. He galloped at an angle to intercept it. Out of the body of pines a long train shot and rushed past, the sun flashing on its sides, its roar deadened by the roar in the pines. Just behind it, among leaves and trash stirred into life and careering madly, along he leaped on the track.

A glimpse he caught of the brass-railed rear platform, where a woman rose quickly from a chair, snatched up a boy smaller than Tommy, and held him high in her arms. The boy waved at him, the woman smiled brilliantly, and he ran after them, leaping into the air, barking his hungry soul out.

But the waving woman and the smiling boy whirled away, and in that desolate country a big Irish setter stood between the rails, and looked with straining eyes after the vanishing rear of the northbound Florida Limited, overhung by coils of smoke.

That was what had brought him down here. Those long, flashing rails led home! He stood oblivious of everything else. He did not hear the shouts, he did not see the burly man jump off his mule, cut a stick, and hurry toward him, gun in hand.

He had endured much during those evil days. But what followed was that which neither man nor dog can ever forgive or forget. At the first blow he sprang about, mad with rage, but the man held the gun—to spring was to spring to death. He dropped down at the man's feet and laid his head over the rail. He did not cry out. But the blows sounded hollow on his gaunt ribs, they ached

[Pg 279]

sickeningly into his very vitals.

It could have had but one ending. Another blow, and he would have leaped at the man's throat and to death. But the other man was rushing at them. "Great God, Jim," he cried, "let up! You want to kill him?" White of face, he had grabbed the stick, and the two stood facing one another. From the pines still rose the great shouting roar.

They came home through the dusk, a silent procession: the burly man rode in front, then the other man, and behind, with drooped head and tail, trotted old Frank. Now and then in the gathering gloom the men looked back at him, but not once did he raise his eyes to them.

"I guess I learned him his lesson, Sam."

Sam did not reply.

"I'm gettin' tired of waitin', anyhow."

Still Sam did not reply.

And his silence must have had its effect; for when they reached home the burly man made the dog come into the shack. The wind had ceased, the night turned chilly, and they let him lie down before the fire of pine knots. The woman brought him a pot of hominy; the men felt his ribs as gently as they could. He shrank from the touch more than from the pain. Kindness had come too late, even for a dog.

[Pg 280]

He lay before the hearth, indifferent to all that happened in this shabby room, for the sight of this fire had made him see another and kindlier fire, in another and kindlier world. These people did not notice his growing restlessness, his furtive glances, his panting breaths, the burning light in his eyes. For steps had come up on the porch; somebody had knocked at the door; the night of their fortune was here!

The burly man hurried to answer, shaking the floor. The open door showed a Negro who handed in a paper. Somebody had sent it from town, he explained, and was gone. The woman snatched the paper. Heads close together, the three stood about a smoking kerosene lamp. The woman was reading in a whiny, excited drawl: "One thousand dollars reward for—"

"I told you so!" burst from the burly man.

"Shut up! Listen!" cried the other.

"Irish setter," she read. "Answers to name Frank. Notify R. A. Lancaster'—Oh, here's a lot of streets and numbers—'New York City.'"

"I told you!" the burly man was shouting. "I told you I knew a dog when I saw one! Look at him, Sam! Look at that head! Look at that dome above the ears! Look at that hair—like silk! The mould that dog was made in is broke!"

[Pg 281]

"One thousand dollars!" gasped the woman. "One thousand dollars!"

When the two men came out with him to his prison the excitement was still rising. The woman had already gone into another room, and the men had got out a bottle. Their voices as they bolted his door and propped a pole against it sounded loud and thick. They stamped up the steps, and he could hear them laughing and shouting in the shack. Surely they could not hear him gnawing—gnawing frantically at his board behind the boxes. They could not hear him jerking at the end of the board, freed at last from the sleeper below. They could not hear the board give way, throwing him on his haunches. Surely they could not hear the little bark that escaped him when the floor opened.

But out in the yard, free at last, he sank suddenly down flat, head between his paws, very still. The back door of the shack had opened and the light shone out across the littered yard, up the walls of his prison, into his very eyes. The burly man had stepped out on the porch.

It was one of those hollow nights when sounds carry far, when a spoken word is a shout.

"I don't hear nothin', Sam."

The other man staggered out.

"Maybe it was a rat," he said.

He could almost hear them breathing.

[Pg 282]

"Guess I imagined," said Sam.

"Sure," said the other.

Their figures darkened the doorway. The burly man clapped the other on the back.

"What I tell you, Sam! One thousand—"

The door closed. The merriment would go on till morning. And old Frank, muscles limbering as he ran, soreness passing out of his side, was galloping through the night, toward the railroad—and home.

Morning found him loping easily along the railroad, nose pointed north like a compass. Now and

then he left the track to let a train pass, looking at it, if it went north, with wistful eyes, then keeping in sight of it as far as he could. He passed a few small stations with big water tanks, he crossed long, low trestles over boundless marshes, he came at dusk to a village.

Hungry, lonely, he approached an unpainted cottage on its outskirts. Two dogs rushed at him; he faced them and they turned back. He trotted on, hair risen in an angry tuft down his back. He slept curled up in an abandoned shed, but not for long. The morning stars lingering low over the flat horizon kept pace with him, then a sea of mottled pink clouds, then the huge red face of the rising sun.

At midday he pounced on an animal like a muskrat that tried to cross the track—a tough thing to kill, a tougher to eat. At dusk he drew near a farmhouse, where a man was chopping wood. The man picked up a stick, ordered him away, then went on chopping. [Pg 283]

He made no more overtures after this, but many a farmer thought a fox had been among his chickens. Habits of civilization had given way perforce to habits of outlawry. Only as he galloped north day after day his eyes still shone with the eager light of the bird dog's craving for human companionship and love.

The number of tracks that branched out from the city whose environs he skirted bewildered him for a minute; then he took the one that pointed due north. All the days he travelled, part of the nights. Sometimes at first he had wondered why he did not reach home, at last to travel always north had become a habit, and he wondered no more.

But the time came when he could not keep on going as fast and as long as formerly. There were days when he found hardly anything at all to eat. The endless ties passing under him began to make him dizzy and faint. His long hair was matted; his ribs showed; his eyes grew haggard. It was a wonder the young man knew him for what he was.

He had come into the freight yards of a town at nightfall, in a cold, driving rain, a bedraggled, forlorn figure, a stray dog. A passenger train had just passed him, stopped at the station ahead, then pulled out. A light glistened down wet rails into his hungry eyes and blinded him. Rows of silent dripping box cars hid the man crossing the track at the street. Frank almost ran into him. Both stopped. The man was buttoned up to his neck in an overcoat and carried a satchel. [Pg 284]

"Hello!" he said.

Frank started to slink back under a box car.

"Come here!" He stooped down and looked into the dog's eyes. "Where did you drop from?" he said. "You come with me! Let's talk it over."

In a warm, firelit cottage room a young woman ran to meet the man—then for the first time she saw the dog.

"Why, John!" she cried. "Where did you get him?"

"He got me," laughed the man, "on the way home from the station. He's starving. Get him something to eat. Then I'll tell you about it."

She glanced at a cradle, whose covers were being suddenly and violently agitated.

"I'll answer for this old fellow," assured the man. "He's seen better days. I think I've seen him before."

Out in the bright little kitchen, where they scraped together all the scraps they could find, he went on:

"Of course I may be mistaken. But at a little station where I sell goods sometimes, I used to see a big red Irish setter following a tall man and a little boy. I think they lived out in the country from there. The kind of folks and the kind of dog you don't forget. If it wasn't so far—hang it, I believe it's the dog, anyhow! Well, we'll take good care of him, and next week when I go through I'll find out." [Pg 285]

The young woman in a raincoat came out in the back yard and held the streaming lantern while the man arranged some sacks underneath the porch and closed and bolted the back gate. He heard them go up the back steps, heard them moving about in the house. Like a decent old fellow he licked the rain from his silken coat, smoothed out the matted strands, then curled up comfortably in his dry bed and slept deep and long.

He stayed with them a week, while strength returned to his muscles, fire to his eyes, courage to his heart. But as he lay before their hearth at night he saw always in his mind that other fire—the fire of home. The stars were still shining that morning when he scrambled over the high back fence and was gone.

But it was with new life and confidence that he continued his journey. He slunk no more on the outskirts of towns; he passed boldly through. Fortune favoured him now; on the second day after he left them he ran into snow, and rabbits are almost helpless before a swift pounce in the snow.

The drifts grew deeper as he travelled north. Fields of dead cotton stalks were varied by fields of withered corn stubble, yellow, broken rows on white hills. There was an occasional big farmhouse now, a house with white pillars like his master's, set in a grove of naked oaks. And at last, [Pg 286]

following fence rows and hedges, lines of cylindrical cedars climbed over and over high hills. The look of home was on the face of nature, the smell of home was in the air.

It was a bitter cold afternoon when the mountains first took shape in the distance. He could make them out, though the sky was heavily overcast. Those were the mountains he saw every morning from the back porch of his home. He barked at them as he ran. He would lie before his own fire this night.

At dusk sudden hunger assailed him. On a hill was a big farmhouse, the windows aglow, smoke veering wildly from the chimneys. And on the wind came the smell of cooking meat. He stopped on an embankment, pricked his ears, licked his chops. Then he scrambled down the embankment and like a big fox made his way along a fence row toward that house from whence came the smell of cooking meat. At the same time flakes of snow began to drive horizontally across the white fields.

Suddenly from out the yard two stocky cream-coloured dogs rushed at him. They came with incredible swiftness through the snow, considering their short bench legs. Frank waited, head up, ears pricked. One was a female; it was she who came first. He would not fight a female; he even wagged his tail haughtily. But in a twinkling she was under him and had caught his hind leg in a crushing, grinding grip. He lunged back, snarling, and the other dog sprang straight at his throat.

[Pg 287]

He was down in the snow, he was on his feet again, he was ripping the short back of the dog at his throat into shreds, his fangs flashing in the dusk. He was dragging them by sheer strength off toward the railroad; but he could not tear that grip from his hind leg, nor that other grip from his throat.

He did not cry out—he was no yelping cur. But it was growing dark, the air was full of snow, the grip was tightening on his throat, the other grip had pulled him down at last to his haunches. Then two men came running toward them, the one white, the other black. The white man grabbed the dog at his throat, the black man the dog under him. The white man was pounding the dog's nose with his fist, was cramming snow down his bloody mouth.

"They'll kill him, Will!" he panted. "Go get some water to throw in their faces."

The black man disappeared running—came back running, a bucket in each hand.

And now it was over, and off there the white man held both his dogs by their collars. They were panting, their wrinkled eyes half closed, their mouths dripping bloody foam. For many yards around the snow was churned into little hillocks. And there lay old Frank, panting hard, head up, eyes shining.

[Pg 288]

"Pick him up, Will!" said the white man. "His leg's broke."

"Cap'n," said the negro, "I'm afraid of him."

The white man swore, shaking his dogs angrily. That was some man's bird dog, a fine one, too.

"I believe that's Steve Earle's setter, from Freedom Hill across the river!" he cried above the wind. "By George, I believe that's just who it is! We'll go and get the sled!"

But when they hurried back with the sled the wounded dog was gone. They followed his bloodstained tracks across the field, up the embankment, and to the railroad. They looked at them between the rails, fast filling with snow. The white man put his hands to his ears.

"He'll freeze to-night," he said.

In the teeth of the wind, like a three-legged automaton, Frank was fighting his way doggedly through the night. The wind almost blew him off the embankments; the swirling waves of snow choked him. Maybe he would have lain down, maybe it would have happened as the man said, if it had not been for the spirit within him and for what he saw.

For just before him the superstructure of an iron trestle rose pencilled in snow against the night. Far below a black river wound serpentine into the mists. A mile to the left, he knew, was Squire Kirby's. In those dim bottoms on either side of the trestle he and his master and the squire had hunted a hundred times. The birds had scattered on those wooded hills now vibrant with the blast. Out on the trestle he picked his slow, hesitating way.

[Pg 289]

Suddenly he cried out sharply. A mighty gust of wind striking him in mid-air and almost hurling him into the blackness below had caused him to put down as a brace his wounded hind leg. Gasping, trembling, he lay down for a minute on the whitened ties, one leg hanging through. Then he rose and doggedly picked his way on.

On the high embankment at the other side of the trestle he stopped and, in spite of the blood stiffened under his throat and the water frozen on his shoulders, he raised his quivering nose. Beyond those misty bottoms, to the left, over those storm-swept ridges, lay Freedom Hill.

Halfway down the embankment he cried out again. He had slipped in the snow and fallen on his leg. Under shelter of the embankment he rested for a moment, panting as if the night were hot. Then lunging, tottering, falling, rising again, panting, gasping but with never another cry, old Frank fought his way up the river bottoms, past the farm of John Davis, across the field in front of Tom Belcher's store, now a dim smudge in the blackness—dragged himself over the last ridge,

dragged himself home.

Belly deep in drifted snow he stood at the corner of the lot fence and surveyed the white distance that lay between him and his kennel—more unattainable to his weakness than a quarter of a continent had been to his strength. And while he stood there the roaring of the wind in the great oaks overhead, the cracking of their naked branches, the swirl of snow against his nose and in his eyes, bewildered him, and suddenly something deep within him whispered to him to lie down and rest.

[Pg 290]

But the sudden terror of death lurked in that whisper and, head dragging in the snow, he staggered across the yard toward his kennel. In here he would crawl and hide from that fearful thing that had told him to lie down in the snow and rest. He reached the kennel, he touched it with his eager nose, he tried to root his way in between the slats which he had not known were there. Then gasping and helpless he sat down before it. The door of his kennel was nailed up. The great hulk of the house loomed dark and silent above it. Maybe his people were gone!

With this new terror in his heart he fought his way around to the side of the house. Underneath his master's window he raised his head and tried to bark. But the wind snatched the muffled sound out of his throat and hurled it away into the darkness. Once more the still small voice that terrified even while it soothed pleaded with him to lie down and rest. Maybe he would have listened now, maybe he would have yielded, if he had not seen through the living-room curtains the sudden flicker of firelight on the ceiling. They were not gone—they were only asleep. Tail wagging strangely as if someone in there had spoken to him, he rose for the last time and struggled toward the front of the house. At the corner a gust of wind, waiting in ambush, rushed at him and stopped him where he was. A moment he waited for it to die down, then dragged himself to the steps, up the steps, his ruined hind leg hitting each one like a rag tied in a knot and frozen.

[Pg 291]

By the big front door he sat down and raised to it his suffering eyes. A hundred times it had opened to his whim; now in his need it barred his way. Gathering all his remaining strength, he raised his paw—the paw he shook hands with—and scratched. There was no sound from within.

Once more—it would be the last time, so heavy had his leg become—he raised his paw and scratched. Then careless of all things, of master and mistress, of life and death, he sank down before the door and laid his head on the sill.

He never knew how it happened. He only knew there was a burst of light in his eyes, and somebody had picked him up. Then faces were bent close to him; something hot and gagging was being poured down his throat; a voice—the most commanding voice in all the world—ordered him to swallow, swallow. And now he saw before him, as he lay on his side, a roaring fire whose flames licked and twisted among oak logs piled high into the chimney.

[Pg 292]

Strange that he had not known that fire all the time; that he had not known who these people were. But then he had been on a long journey, and he was tired, very tired. He must tell them he knew now, let them know he appreciated what they were doing. He always did that even with strangers, and these—they were his master, his mistress, his Tommy. He must—

It was Tommy's shrill voice that broke the silence.

"Look, Papa, look, look! He wagged his tail. He wagged his old tail!"

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRANK OF FREEDOM HILL ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms

will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT,

CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written

confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.