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Title: Rick and Ruddy: The Story of a Boy and His Dog

Author: Howard Roger Garis

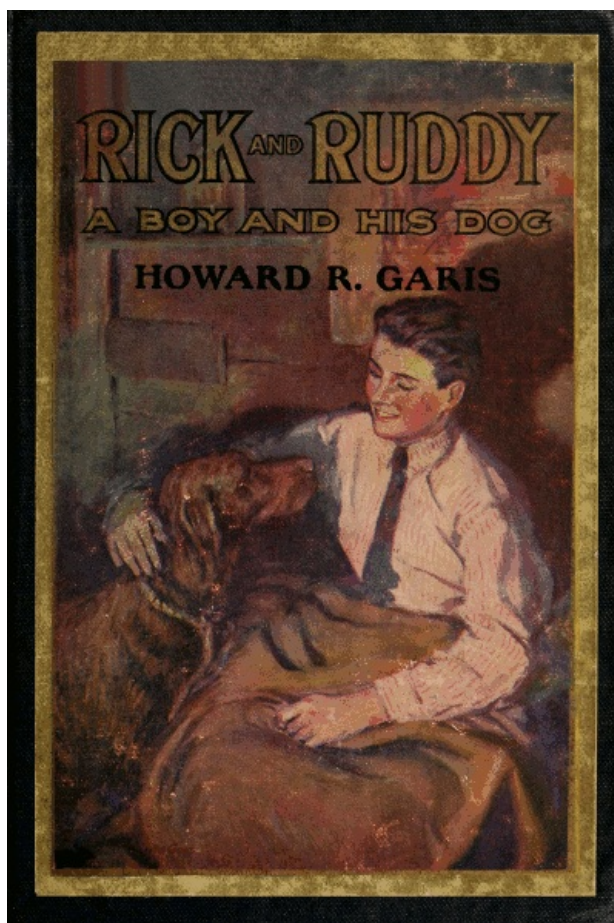
Illustrator: John Goss

Release Date: November 26, 2010 [EBook #34448]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by David Edwards, Louise Pattison and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net> (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive)

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK RICK AND RUDDY: THE STORY OF A BOY AND HIS DOG ***



RICK AND RUDDY

A BOY AND HIS DOG

HOWARD R. GARIS



"Oh, yes, it's Ruddy! It's my dog, all right!"
cried Rick.

Page 243.

Rick and Ruddy

THE STORY OF A BOY AND HIS DOG

BY

HOWARD R. GARIS

Author of the "Uncle Wiggily Bedtime Stories," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOHN GOSS

1920

MILTON BRADLEY COMPANY
SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

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Bradley Quality Books
for Children

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RICK AND RUDDY

[Pg 1]

CHAPTER I RICK WANTS A DOG

Rick Dalton sat on the sandy beach tossing white stones and bits of shell into the little waves that broke almost at his feet. The tide was just on the turn; soon it would come in, and the big, booming rollers would drive Rick farther up toward the dunes, where the wind was making a queer, whistling sound as it bent the long spears of saw-edged grass, whipping off venturesome, gray hoppers, that had boldly crawled up, perhaps to get a better view of the heaving ocean.

"I don't care!" murmured Rick, but, from the tone of his voice, and the look on his face, one might have said that he did care, and very much, too, about something. But still Rick said: "I don't care!" And he said it over and over, until it was almost like the song the waves seemed to sing as they swished up the beach, rolling over and over the white sand, pebbles and bits of shell, swishing them along as if they, too, didn't care what happened.

[Pg 2]

"I don't care!" exclaimed Rick again, as he tossed a larger stone out so that it fell with a splash

near a floating bit of wood, and frightened away an osprey that was about to swoop down and catch a sea bass which had ventured too near the surface. "I want a dog! I just want a dog, and I think mother might let me have one! I don't care!"

Just why he said that Rick didn't know, for he did care very much about something—and that was to have a dog. He dug his fingers deep in the sand, scooped up a wet mass of it in his palm, and tossed it high into the air. It fell about him in a little shower, and then, as Rick was about to repeat this, a wave, larger than any of the others, rolled up and nearly wet his feet.

And as Rick had on his shoes and stockings, he hastily scrambled back out of the way of the ocean, for salt water is bad for leather, as everyone knows who has ever been to the seashore. [Pg 3]

"Tide's coming in!" mused Rick. "Must be four o'clock. If I had a dog now——"

He rose slowly to his feet, looked up and down the beach and out across the sea. In the distance was a smudge of smoke from a coast steamer.

"Wish I was on her!" murmured the boy. "If I was maybe mother'd let me have a dog. There's most always a dog on a ship. Oh, why can't I have a dog?"

No one answered Rick Dalton. There was no one there to speak, unless, perhaps, it was the fish hawk, and, if he could have talked Rick's language he might have told the small boy what he thought about him for having spoiled his dinner. For the dinner of the osprey depended on his catch of fish—and, not only his dinner, but the dinner of the hungry, little whistling birds in the dead pine tree farther inland.

But all the boy heard was the swish of the waves as they whispered among the bits of shell and white pebbles—that and the whistle of the wind in the rank grass that grew atop the sand dunes. [Pg 4]

"Tide's coming in," mused Rick. "Four o'clock, and I've got to go to the store. If I had a dog he could carry the things for me. Oh, I wish I had a dog!"

Rick dug the toe of his shoe into the sand, turned for a last look at the ocean and then trudged over the little hills that bordered the shore and soon was on his way to the village. It was when he was at home again, after having gone to the store, as his mother had told him to do at 4 o'clock—when the tide turned—it was then that Rick again voiced his wish.

"Why can't I have a dog, mother?" he asked. "I'm old enough now, and lots of the boys have 'em! Henry Blake, he's got a dog he says I can have. Why can't I have him?"

"Doesn't Henry want his dog any more?" asked Mrs. Dalton, as she took the bundle of groceries Rick had brought.

"No!" was the eager answer, and Rick seemed to seize on the question as a ray of hope. "Oh, can I have his dog?" [Pg 5]

"No, Richard, dear," answered his mother gently. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but, really I don't want you to have a dog—just yet."

"But when may I have one?" he asked.

"Well, perhaps when Mazie gets a little older, so I could trust her around a dog. As she is now, she'd just as soon pull a dog's tail as not, or put her hand in his mouth, and she might be bitten. You wouldn't want your little sister to be bitten, would you?"

"No, mother! Course not! Henry's dog doesn't bite. And if I could have him I'd take care of Mazie so she wouldn't pull his tail, or anything! Please, mother!"

Mrs. Dalton shook her head.

"You might think you could look after Mazie," she said with a smile, "but I'd always be afraid—for a while, at least."

"How long before she'll be old enough so I can have a dog, mother?" asked Rick.

"Oh, in a year, perhaps. But I wish you wouldn't tease now, Rick, dear. Bring me a few chips to boil the kettle. It's almost supper time and your father will be here soon." [Pg 6]

"If I had a dog," said Rick, in a dull, sad sort of voice, "I could teach him to bring in a basket of chips every night. It would be a good trick for him!"

"Why, Richard, dear! You don't mind bringing me in a few chips; do you?" asked his mother.

"Oh, no'm, course not!" he answered quickly. "But it would be a lot of fun if I had a dog and *he* could bring 'em in; wouldn't it, mother?"

"It might, if he didn't run all over the yard with the basket, and spill my wood," she answered.

"Oh, my dog wouldn't do that!" declared Rick. "He'd be a good dog. Henry Blake's dog is a good one. His name is Spot and he jumps in Weed River and brings out sticks when Hen throws 'em in."

"Why does Henry want to give away his dog?" asked Mrs. Dalton, when Rick had set the basket of chips behind the stove.

"Cause he's going to move away. Hen's father's going to work over in Bellport at the electric light place and Hen said I could have his dog. He's going to get a new one. Please, couldn't I?"

[Pg 7]

"No, Richard, dear! I'm sorry, but really I'd be worried if you had a dog. I'd be thinking, all the while, that you or Sister were going to be bitten. After you get older, perhaps you may have a dog. Now go get Mazie for me, please. I want to wash her and get her ready for supper."

Rick found his sister playing in the front yard with Mabel Fenton, who lived next door. The two little girls had their dolls, and were dressing them up in green leaves, pretending they were new dresses.

"Oh, Ricky!" exclaimed Mazie (which was a pet name for Mary) as she walked around the side path with her brother. "Oh, Ricky! What you think?"

"What?" he asked.

"Why Mabel and I are goin' to have a doll party to-morrow, and you can come to it if you want to, Ricky!" invited Mazie.

"I don't want to come to a doll party!" exclaimed Rick, as he tossed a bit of stick up into the air, and then hit it with a swiftly-thrown stone. "Doll party! Pooh!"

[Pg 8]

"We're goin' to have *real* things to eat—not make-believe!" went on Mazie.

"Honest?" asked Rick.

"Honest cross-my-heart!" exclaimed his sister. She was about two years younger than Rick, who was "nine-goin'-on-ten."

"Um! Well, maybe I'll come," said Rick, as if he were giving the favor, instead of getting it. "Could I bring my dog, Mazie?" he asked.

"Your dog!" exclaimed the little girl. "You hasn't *got* any dog, Ricky Dalton!"

"I know I haven't got one *now*!" he admitted, very frankly. "But maybe I'll get one. I keep on asking mother, every day, and maybe she'll let me have one after a while. You wouldn't be afraid of a dog; would you, Mazie?"

"Course not!" she answered.

"Cause maybe I'll get Henry Blake's dog after he moves away," went on Rick. "I wish I had a dog. He could bring in chips and go to the store with me. I was down to the beach to-day, and I just wanted a dog an awful lot."

[Pg 9]

"Does dogs ever come up out of the ocean?" asked Mazie.

"Dogs come out of the ocean? Course not!" exclaimed her brother. "How could they?"

"Well, we get wood for the fire out of the ocean—it comes up on the beach," said Mazie, stopping to look at a little speck of dirt on her doll's nose. "Wood comes out of the ocean and once we got some lemons and cocoanuts—don't you 'member?"

"Yes, I remember," answered Rick. "But the lemons and cocoanuts were washed overboard off a ship that sank, and some of the cocoanuts were spoiled sour."

"A dog wouldn't spoil sour if he was in the ocean; would he?" Mazie wanted to know.

"Course not!" laughed Rick. "But dogs couldn't come up out the ocean, and be washed on the beach like the lemons and cocoanuts."

"A dog could, if he was washed overboard off a ship," went on Mazie, for, having lived all her life near the sea, she knew what being washed overboard meant. "If a dog fell off a ship and come on shore then you could have him; couldn't you, Ricky?" she asked.

[Pg 10]

"Yes," answered her brother, slowly, "but I don't guess that will happen. But oh! I do want a dog!"

It was after supper that night, when Rick was playing ball in the vacant lots back of his house, and Mazie and the little girl from next door were sitting on the side steps, talking about the play-party for their dolls next day, that Mrs. Dalton said to her husband:

"I don't know what to do about Rick!"

"Why, he hasn't been bad; has he?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Oh, no, Rick is a very good boy," his mother answered. "But he does tease so for a dog!"

"A dog!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "Hum, yes, a dog! Well, I s'pose it's natural for a boy to want a dog. I had one when I was a lad."

"Did he ever bite you?" asked his wife.

"No, I can't say he ever did."

"That's what I'm so afraid of—that if ever Rick did have a dog it might bite him or Mazie. And, if it did——"

[Pg 11]

Mrs. Dalton did not finish. But she looked at her husband and shook her head.

"Good dogs don't very often bite, unless they're teased," he said. "And I don't believe Rick would tease a dog."

"No, but Mazie might. She isn't afraid of anything. The other day she came in with a little snake she had found out in the yard. It was alive, too."

"Probably a milk, or garter, snake," said Mr. Dalton with a laugh. "I used to pick 'em up when I was a boy. They're harmless."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed his wife. "Would you really want Rick to have a dog?" she asked.

"Hum! Well, I don't know," he slowly answered. "A boy and a dog seem to go together, somehow. But I don't s'pose it would do any harm to wait another year. If Rick teases you too much, let me talk to him, and——"

"Oh, I wouldn't want to do *that*. I can manage him. He's got a notion that Henry Blake might give away his dog. But I don't just like that kind. I'd want a shepherd dog, I think, if ever I let the children have one." [Pg 12]

"I don't know much about Henry Blake's dog," spoke Mr. Dalton. "But I guess we won't let Rick have one right away. He can wait. Hello, nearly nine o'clock!" he went on, as he looked at his watch in the faint light of the moon, which, now and then, shone through the clouds. "I'll call the children in. Rick's finished playing ball long ago. I hear him talking with the boys over in the lots. We're going to have a storm, I guess, by the way the old ocean is booming to-night. Wind's in the north-east, too!"

"Oh, I don't like north-easters!" exclaimed Mrs. Dalton. "The wind gets so terrible!"

"Yes, a September storm can sometimes tear things up pretty badly," said her husband, as he arose from his seat on the porch. "Well, maybe this won't be as bad as they sometimes are."

Rick and Mazie were called in and sent up to bed, and then their father and mother sat down stairs to read. The wind freshened and the beach, where Rick had sat that afternoon, tossing pebbles into the little waves, was covered with white-capped breakers. [Pg 13]

"Mazie!" called Rick, in a whisper from his room across the hall. "Mazie—are you asleep?"

"Almost," she drowsily answered. "Are you?"

"No. I say, Mazie, did you—did you ever say your prayers for anything you wanted an awful lot, like a—like a doll, or a pair of roller skates?"

"Yep! I did once!" said the little girl. "Once I prayed for a doll carriage."

"Did you get it?" asked Rick, eagerly.

"No, but I got a cradle and that was just as good. Why, Rick?"

"Oh—oh, nothin'!" he answered. "Good-night!"

"G'-night," she murmured, sleepily.

"She prayed for a doll carriage and she got a cradle," mused Rick. "I—I wonder if—if I prayed for a dog—if I'd get—a *cat*?"

He listened to the distant booming of the surf.

"I—I guess I'll take a chance," he whispered in the dark. [Pg 14]

CHAPTER II

RUDDY WANTS A HOME

Straight out of the north-east blew the wind. It whipped its way across three thousand miles of open, salty water, growing stronger and fiercer every mile it traveled, until, when it reached the beach at Belemere, it was blowing a gale. The ocean waves, which had been small at first, grew larger and larger, and their white, foamy crests were whipped into spray that mingled with the whirling sand and made the beach guard shut his eyes when he felt the stinging in his face.

"This is a regular rip-snorter of a north-easter!" he muttered to himself as he pulled his oilskin cap closer down over his head. "A regular rip-snorter, and I can't see a hundred fathoms out!"

He strained his eyes, trying to pierce the rainy, wind-swept and spume-filled darkness that hovered over the heaving ocean. He wanted to see—if it were there to be seen—the flickering signal-light of a vessel in distress. [Pg 15]

That is, it was his duty to see it, if such a signal were flashed, and to hurry to the nearest station and spread the alarm. And yet he hoped there would be no need of that.

"Mighty hard to see a wreck, even if there is one," the coast guard murmured. He did not open

his mouth to speak aloud, as he sometimes did other nights, on his lonely patrol. If he had opened his mouth this night it would have been filled at once with rain and salty spray and his breath might have been blown down his throat by the wind. So he kept his lips closed and merely murmured.

"Worst storm for early September I ever see!" was his thought. "Hope none of the vessels come too close in shore. It'd be a hard job getting a crew together now for the boat, or breeches buoy."

In July, August, and early in September, on our Eastern coasts, the life saving force is on vacation, save for a captain and one man at each station to patrol the beach. The summer months are seldom marked by storms and wrecks, and there is not often need of the services of the life-savers. When such occasion arises the station captain, or his one helper, calls for volunteers. [Pg 16]

Stronger blew the wind, and the rain came down harder, mingling with the salty spume and spray from the ocean. The place where Rick Dalton had sat on the beach that afternoon, and wished for a dog, was now a seething caldron of white foam, and the sand dunes were under water.

"High tide and a north-easter!" mused the coast guard. "Shouldn't wonder but what a lot of bulkheads would be torn loose to-night. Bluefish and moss bunkers! That was a fierce one!"

A stronger force of the gusty wind fairly stopped him in his tracks, and he actually had to lean forward to keep his balance. It was hard walking on the sand. Part of the shore of Belemere was marked by a board walk, for the place was visited by a small summer population of "city folks," and on this walk the going was better. But it did not extend more than half a mile. Belemere was not well enough known as yet to have a fashionable board walk, that would be thronged in the evenings. [Pg 17]

And now there was not a soul on it, even at the early hour of ten o'clock. For the wind and spray swept over it, and, in places, the waves actually washed under it, and partly across the road it bordered.

Trudging along, now and then bringing up to take a view out over the heaving billows, which showed dimly white in the black night, the coast guard kept on his beat. He was well protected against the storm, for there had been ample warning of its coming. But so strongly did the wind whip the rain along that the drops sought out every opening in his oilskins and the guard felt the chill of the water.

"It sure is a rip-snorter!" he murmured.

He must walk to the end of his particular section, or beat—almost to Bay Head—the next station, there to meet the guard from the adjoining section of coast.

As Sig Bailey, the guard who had been muttering about the storm, swerved farther up the beach to avoid a far-reaching wave, he saw a dim shape scurrying among the sand dunes. At first he thought it merely a bunch of seaweed, blown by the blast, but it did not slump down in a heap as seaweed naturally would when the gust of wind ceased for a moment. [Pg 18]

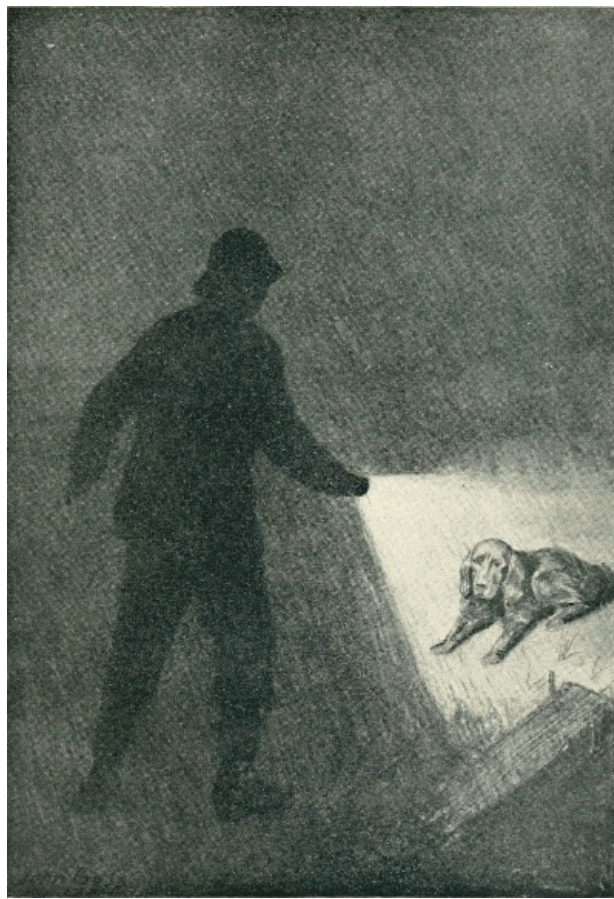
"Hello there!" cried the coast guard. "Who are you?"

For he saw that it was something alive—something that was seeking a shelter from the storm.

For a moment he felt a little sensation of fear. There are so many strange tales of the sea, and that which comes out of the sea. Perhaps it was some weird creature of the deep, cast up by the churning of the waves. Sig had heard such stories. Then his common sense came to his aid.

There followed a moment's lull in the storm and Sig, clearing his eyes of the rain and the salt spray, looked among the sand dunes for what he had seen.

Yes, there it was again—some moving shape.



"Why, it's a dog! A puppy!"

"Might be a man—crawling on his hands and knees," mused the coast guard. "Too weak to stand up, maybe. Been washed in off some boat. But I haven't heard anything of a wreck. I wonder——" [Pg 19]

The dim shape seemed to come toward him, and for a moment Sig felt afraid again. Then he thought of the powerful electric flashlight in his outside pocket. It was the work of a moment to focus its beams on the subject. Then Sig exclaimed:

"Why, it's a dog! A puppy, and a red one at that! Must be some sort of a setter! I've seen pictures of 'em—Irish or Gordon setter! Hi, boy!" he called to the dog.

The creature slunk toward him, almost crawling on its stomach so far down did it cringe. Rain-soaked, sea-sprayed and frightened it crawled to the feet of the coast guard, and lay there whimpering.

"Well, old boy! Poor dog! Poor puppy! And you aren't really any more'n a puppy!" murmured the man in his dripping oilskins as he continued to shine the light on the cringing dog. "What's the matter, old fellow?"

At the sound of the kind voice the dog looked up and feebly wagged his tail, thumping it on the wet sand. [Pg 20]

"Somebody's been beating you; more shame to 'em!" murmured the guard as he patted the wet head. "What's the matter, old boy? Hungry?"

A little whine, a look such as only a dog can give, and another wag and thump of the tail. The animal snuggled closer to the rubber boots of the guard.

Sig looked up the beach. He was due, soon, to meet the other man from Bay Head. It would not do to be late. But he saw no flicker of light, such as his partner of the night sometimes showed. The beach was dark, wave-swept and rain-soaked.

"Poor dog!" murmured the guard, turning his back to the wind so he might not swallow his words. "Wonder where you came from? Never saw you before that I know of. Nobody in the village owns a dog like you! Did you come off some boat? Might have in this blow; you're wet enough, land knows!"

Again he reached over to pat the head and the dog licked his hand. Sig fumbled inside his oilskin coat. He carried a sandwich or two to eat for his midnight lunch, and he had not yet opened the packet his wife had put up. He did so now, not daring to bring it from beneath the shelter of the yellow garment, for fear of having the bread and meat rained on and salt-soaked at once. But he broke off a part of the sandwich in his pocket, tearing the paper in which it was wrapped, and fed it to the dog. [Pg 21]

Eagerly and hungrily the castaway of the night devoured the morsel—it was small at best.

"Wish I could spare you more, old boy!" murmured the man. "Tell you what I'll do," he went on, almost as though speaking to a human. "You stay here. I'll go meet Bill Park, and maybe he's got

more of a snack than he wants. I'll get some for you. Stay here now. If you go up among the dunes you'll be out of the wind—some."

He pointed to a little range of larger hummocks of sand, which would keep off the worst of the gale. Sig flashed his light toward them and waved it to and fro. The dog whined a little and then slunk off, his tail hanging between his legs. [Pg 22]

"Salt mackerel!" exclaimed Sig. "I hope he doesn't think I'm drivin' him away. It's only for your own good, red-dog!" he went on. "I'll be back in a little while with something to eat—if Bill has any. You go up there and wait for me!"

Whether the animal really knew what the man said, or thought he was being ordered away, Sig could not tell. But the dog slunk on in the rain and storm and darkness, toward the sand dunes. In a few seconds he was lost to sight.

"I'd let you follow along after me, but there's no need, and you'd only get blown away, maybe," mused the man. "Might slip into the inlet, too, in the dark. Best stay up there until I come back."

He hurried on, his eyes strained, now out to sea again up the beach. Presently he caught the gleam of a little flash of light and he sent out a flicker of his own in answer.

"That's Bill!" he murmured.

A little later he and the other coast guard were exchanging brass disks. These, like the watchman's time clock, proved that the men had walked their posts. [Pg 23]

"Got more grub'n you want to-night, Bill?" asked Sig.

"Might have—why?"

"Oh, met a stray dog back near the broken jetty. Seems like he was 'most starved. I didn't bring more grub than I needed, but if you've got a bit of bread and meat you can spare——"

"Sure! Here! Take a sandwich. Wife put me up three to-night. Two's all I need. Nasty bit of weather!"

"Regular rip-snorter!"

They parted, and as Sig neared the place where he had last seen the dog he whistled and called. He waited, but no slinking form came from the wet sand dunes.

"Come on, boy!" called the guard, raising his voice. "I got meat for ye! Come here!"

He whistled and flashed his light, but the waif did not come.

"Poor little red pup," murmured Sig. "I'd like to get hold of the man who beat you! Well, I'll put this away for you. I'll be back here in about two hours." [Pg 24]

The "red pup," as Sig had called him, had really thought the big man in the yellow coat was driving him away. "Ruddy," to give him the name he was afterward called by, had been driven away often of late. His life had not been a glad one.

Dimly he remembered some puppy days; brief, happy ones with his mother. The other, and following days and weeks were spent among boxes and barrels of refuse on a street in a big city that bordered the river front—where big ships tied up at the docks.

Then Ruddy had a dim recollection of a big bearded man, with hob nails in his shoes, who took him away from the yard where the red pup had spent some of his early and first unhappy days. And the nails in the shoes of the big bearded man hurt when he used them on Ruddy as he did—far too often.

Ruddy, one night, found himself tossed into a box with such force that he lay there stunned. If he had been able to listen to, and understand talk, as, later he came to be able to do, he would have heard someone growl: [Pg 25]

"What you got there?"

"Oh, a red pup I picked up," was the answer. "The old ship needs a mascot and I brought this one along. I always wanted a dog."

"You don't act as if you cared much for this one," spoke the first man.

"Oh, I didn't hurt him," was the reply. But Ruddy was hurt, and from then on he feared that man.

He did not remember much—but there was a confused memory of being on a floor that heaved up and down, and slid this way and that as the floors, or decks of boats always do. And then came a great storm wave—Ruddy felt himself washed overboard and into the sea.

It was not the first time he had been in water, so he knew how to swim. But he had never tried before to swim in such a smother and swirl of salty waves, where the wind seemed to blow away his gasping breath. Still he swam on, until he was cast up on the beach and he met the coast guard. [Pg 26]

And even the guard had seemed to drive Ruddy away. Of course poor Ruddy was mistaken, but that was his thought. He slunk up among the sand dunes.

That little bit of bread and meat meant much to him, for he was starving. It gave him a little courage. In the storm and darkness he wandered among the dunes, or little sand hills, until presently he found himself down on the beach again, where the wind and rain and salty spume were worse than ever.

"Oh, if I only had a home—some warm place into which I could crawl!"

That would have been Ruddy's thought if he could have spoken.

How he did want a home!

And how Rick, sleeping in his little white bed, did want a dog!

[Pg 27]

CHAPTER III

RICK AND RUDDY

Washed overboard from the deck of the vessel, not long after he had been roughly tossed into a box by the man who wanted a lucky "mascot," Ruddy had swam ashore. The food given him by the coast guard had dulled, just a little, the gnawing pangs of hunger, and now, as Ruddy crouched among the sand hills, trying to find shelter from the storm, he felt the first gleam of hope that had come to him in many a day.

"Maybe I'll find a home after all," he thought to himself, for I believe that dogs can talk and think—not as we do, of course; perhaps sometimes not as well, and again, perhaps, better. But they do think. And so Ruddy, which was to be his name, as it was now his color, thought and hoped.

The man had driven him away—so Ruddy believed, but in this he was wrong. Very well. It was not the first time he had been driven away. He would have to look for someone else who would feed him, or at least give him the chance to feed himself. He would have to look for someone else whom he might love as only a dog can love—with all his heart and being.

[Pg 28]

"I'll stay here until morning," reasoned Ruddy, dog-fashion. "It's too dark now to see where to go, and it's raining too hard. I'll stay here in the sand until morning, then I can see better."

Dogs do not have very good eyesight—not nearly as good as cats. In fact a dog can not see far enough to tell his master from among a group of other boys, if his master is more than a few hundred feet away. But if the wind is blowing toward the dog, and he once catches a whiff of the scent, or smell, of the boy he knows so well, he does not need eyes to tell him what he wants to know. An eagle could not dart with any more sureness toward an object than can a dog, once he catches the smell of his master.

And Ruddy, like all dogs, poor of sight even in daytime, and hardly able to see at all in the dark, knew it was useless to try to look for a home in that blackness and storm. A cat might have found her way to where she wanted to go, but Ruddy did not even know where to look for a home. He was a wanderer—an outcast.

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Up among the sand dunes grew clumps of tall, coarse grass. One of these clumps would make a resting place for the dog. He found a mass of green stems that were thicker than the others, found it by smelling his way and feeling, rather than by sight, and then made himself a sort of nest, by turning around and around before he curled up to lie down.

Nearly all dogs—even the tiny poodle that sleeps on a blue cushion in some lady's parlor—turn around and around on their bed before settling down to go to sleep. Perhaps the dogs themselves do not know why they do this, but it is because all dogs were once wild, like wolves. In fact dogs really come from wolves, ages back. And wild animals, going to sleep in the woods or jungle, have to be careful of where they make their bed. If they curled up in the first bunch of grass they came to, they might lie down on some snake, or scorpion, which would bite them.

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So, ages back, the wild dogs, little different from wolves, got in the habit of trampling their grassy bed, walking around and around in it. They did not do this to make it snug and cozy, as perhaps a cat might do. They did it to trample on and drive out any snakes that might be hidden in the grass.

And so Ruddy, before he curled up to try to go to sleep in the sedge grass of the sand dunes, did just as his wild, wolfish ancestors had done—he trampled the grass. Of course there were no snakes in it, but Ruddy must make sure in the only way he knew.

"There, I guess this will do until morning," said Ruddy to himself, thinking in dog-fashion, of course.

Then he curled up and went to sleep. He was tired from his swim to shore through the storm, and he was still hungry. The bit of bread and meat the coast guard had given him was hardly enough for a small kitten, and Ruddy was quite a large puppy now. But it was the best he could get.

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"Maybe, in the morning, I'll find a home," thought Ruddy. "The kind of a home I used to have when I was very little."

And Rick, sleeping in his white bed, safe and snug and warm away from the north-easter,

awakened for a moment and stared up at the ceiling. He heard the beat of rain on the dark window of his room.

"Maybe, when it's morning, I'll have a dog," he whispered. "I—I hope it isn't a cat!"

Perhaps Ruddy dreamed of the happy days of his smallest puppyhood. Those days had been happy, for he had lived them in a fine barn, with his mother, and several other little reddish-brown puppies like himself. They tumbled about in the straw, and there were horses that Ruddy learned to love, in the short time he knew them, almost as much as he loved a certain boy and girl who raced out from the big house, every morning, to look at, laugh over and play with the puppies, of whom Ruddy was one.

Then had come sad days, when he was sold and taken away from the tumbling, weak-legged brothers and sisters, and the mother dog, against whose warm flanks Ruddy loved to cuddle.

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At first these changed days had not been unhappy, for Ruddy was given a home in another barn, where there was only one horse, instead of many, and where a man came to feed him every morning. But a tramp had stolen Ruddy away, and then had left him behind in the woods, too lazy to take the little dog with him.

After that Ruddy had taken part in many adventures, coming at last to live in the slums of a city, where a man claimed him as his own. And the man had taken Ruddy with him on the ship, and then had come a terrible time in the storm, when the red-brown puppy was washed overboard.

All these thoughts and remembrances fleetingly came to Ruddy as he was curled up in the sedge grass, sheltered as much as he could be sheltered from the rain and salty spume-scattering wind.

The longest night must have an end, and so to Ruddy daylight finally came, and, with it, the breaking of the storm. It was cold, though it was early September, but September was being crowded off the calendar by October, and the rays of the early sun, as the big, golden ball seemed to rise from the heaving ocean, had little warmth in them. It was as if the sun's rays came from a looking glass.

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Cold, shivery and hungry, Ruddy crept from his nest in the grass, even as his jungle ancestors might have crept from theirs. But there was no warmth to greet him, and he did not know where to get any food.

"I'm certainly hungry!" said Ruddy to himself. "I wonder where I can get something to eat?"

Down a little way from the sand dunes stretched the beach, with the surf pounding on it. Here and there a stray fish was cast up, and, had Ruddy known it, this might have provided a breakfast for him. But Ruddy was not a cat. He was not specially fond of fish, and he was afraid of the ocean—at any rate for a time. He had nearly been drowned in it, and he did not want to go near the big waves again; at least right away. So he turned from the beach and, heading inland, sniffed the air, with head held as high as he could raise it.

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Ruddy remembered that his mother, among the lessons she had taught him, had told him how much depended on his nose.

"You can't tell so much about a thing by *looking* at it as you can by *smelling* of it," she had said. That is why Ruddy, as all dogs do, always smelled of anything before he ate it. His eyesight could not be depended on, but his nose could. And now Ruddy was sniffing the air.

It was not because he wanted to eat air for his breakfast, but the air, and the wind, which is only air in motion, might bring to him the whiff, or smell, that would tell him where he could find food.

Now from the ocean came the smell of the salty sea. Ruddy was sure he had had enough of that. But as he turned his nose inshore he caught the smell of men and boys and horses—the human smell, so to speak, and he knew that there, if anywhere, he would find something to eat.

And so, traveling on rather weak and uncertain legs, because he needed food, Ruddy started toward the little village of Belemere, where Rick, the boy, lived. Though, of course, Ruddy did not yet know that.

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It was early, for the sun was just rising, and not many persons were up and about. Here a milkman was going his rounds, and soon the baker would follow, for even in the little fishing town few did their own baking, at least of their daily bread, and there were scarcely any cows.

Ruddy looked at the rattling milk wagon. He knew what was in the cans and bottles, and he would have loved a drink of milk. But the man on the wagon had not time for small, brown puppies, even if he had seen Ruddy, which perhaps he did not.

The baker, too, might have tossed him a roll, for there were many in the wooden bin back of the seat. But the baker did not give Ruddy a thought.

And so the homeless dog walked slowly on, sniffing here and there trying to find, in the only way he knew, something to eat. And, as luck would have it, Ruddy turned into the yard of the house where Rick lived. There seemed to be no one up, and so, from having been a sort of a tramp dog in at least half of the days he had thus far lived, Ruddy trotted around to the back door. That is where tramps—whether men or dogs—always go; to the back door. Later on they may use the front way.

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Ruddy knew at back doors there were sometimes boxes, barrels or cans filled with what might be called food. It was not as nice as he could have wished, but often he had found a perfectly good bone in this way—a bone which was not too hard for his puppy teeth that were fast growing stronger.

"I hope I find some meat this morning," thought Ruddy. "There isn't much on a bone, lots of times it's almost bare, and I'm terribly hungry!"

He saw some cans at the back door. From one came the delicious smell of meat, and with a joyful yelp Ruddy began nosing about it. The cover was on the can, but Ruddy knew how to shove this off—that is if it were not on too tightly.

But this one was tight. Push as he did with his paws and nose, Ruddy could not uncover the can to get at the meat, the smell of which came through a crack in the top. And then, being only a little dog—a poor, cold, hungry puppy, Ruddy raised his head and howled. It was just as if some small boy or girl had cried.

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Sadly and mournfully Ruddy howled, because he could not shove the cover off the garbage pail, and get at what was within. And then, with the first echo of the hungry dog's cry dying away, the kitchen door opened and there stood Rick.

At first the boy could scarcely believe that what he saw was real—a small, reddish-brown dog at his doorsteps. But then, as Ruddy stopped howling, wagged his tail and crawled to Rick's feet, the boy's eyes sparkled in delight. He leaned down, put his arms around Ruddy's neck, hugging him close, as only a boy can hug a dog, and Rick shouted.

"He's come! He's here! I got him!"

"What's that? Who's there? What have you got?" asked Rick's mother.

"I've got a dog!" cried Rick in ringing tones. "He came in the night. I prayed that I'd get him, and I did! He's here! I was afraid it might be a cat, like Mazie prayed for a doll carriage and got a cradle. But I got a dog all right. Oh, you're my dog! You're my dog!" and then Ruddy, looking up into the eyes of Rick, knew that he had found what he wanted all his short life—someone to whom he could really belong!

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Mrs. Dalton came to the door. She looked at Rick hugging the reddish-brown puppy, and a troubled look came over her face.

"Where did you get him?" she asked.

"He was right here—on the steps waiting for me," answered Rick. "I hoped he'd be here when I woke up, but I couldn't be sure. You see I didn't pray very long—only one night."

"Richard Dalton! You didn't pray for a dog; did you?" asked his mother, rather shocked, though she did not know exactly why.

"Course I prayed for a dog," Rick answered. "Isn't it all right to pray for what you want?"

His mother did not answer that question.

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"You can't keep him," she said.

"Why not?" and there was alarm in Rick's tone and glance as he stopped patting the brown head and looking into the brown eyes of Ruddy. "Why can't I keep my dog?"

"Because he isn't yours," answered his mother.

"But he came to me—in the night. Maybe he came up out of the sea, like Mazie said. Anyhow he was here waiting for me. Course he's my dog!" and the boy put his arms about Ruddy's neck.

"No, Rick dear," answered his mother. "This may be a nice dog, and you may like him very much, but he must belong to someone else."

"Then couldn't I keep him 'till someone comes for him?" asked the boy. "He likes me—look how he stays with me."

"Yes, a puppy will stay with anyone," said Mrs. Dalton. "But I don't want you to have a dog, Rick. I'm afraid of them."

"Not this one—not—not Ruddy!" exclaimed Rick, giving the dog that name as it seemed best to fit him. "Why he'd just love Mazie! He wouldn't bite her and he can't scratch like a cat. Please, mother, let me keep this dog! He's mine! He came to me in the night! He was here waiting for me when I came down to see if I'd got one!"

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Mrs. Dalton found it hard to refuse. She loved animals herself, and her only fear of a dog was on account of little Mazie.

"Well, you may keep him until after breakfast, anyhow," she said. "I expect he's hungry. Give him some milk, and then get washed for your own meal."

"Couldn't he have some meat, too?" asked Rick.

"I'll see if I can find him a few scraps. Too much meat isn't good for little dogs. Milk is better. But

this isn't such a puppy as I thought at first. I'll see what I can find for him."

And what a meal that was to half-starved Ruddy! Never had scraps of meat, bits of bread and potato and milk tasted so good! He paused now and then, in his eager bolting of the food, to look up at Rick and his mother. Ruddy divided his glances of affection between them, for he did not know to whom he owed most. He ate quickly. A dog does not need to chew his food very much, as it is taken care of in his wonderful stomach. In that he is not like boys and girls, who, the more they chew their food, the better off they are.

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"Oh, what you got?" cried a voice behind Rick, as he was watching his dog eat. "What you got?"

"A dog, Mazie," answered her brother. "It's my dog! He came in the night, and he was waiting down on the back steps for me. I prayed for him. Did you pray too, Mazie?"

"No. I—I was going to," said the little girl, "but I was so sleepy I forgot whether you said a dog or a cat, so I just prayed for a new doll for me. Oh, he's a nice dog!"

"I just guess he is!" cried Rick already proud in ownership of something real and alive and almost human. "He's my dog!"

Mrs. Dalton said nothing, but she looked over the heads of the children toward her husband.

"So Rick's found a dog after all; has he?" spoke Mr. Dalton, as he got ready to go to work. "Well! Well! He isn't such a bad dog, either."

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"No, he seems right nice," spoke Mrs. Dalton. "But he must belong to someone."

"He belongs to me!" declared Rick. "I don't need Henry Blake's dog now; I got one of my own!"

The kitchen door was open. The sun was shining warmer now on the back steps, and Ruddy wanted to lie down in that patch of yellow light, and bask in the glow after his meal. Rick followed his new pet outside.

Sig Bailey, the coast guard, was just coming off duty, and going past the house on his way to home and breakfast. He looked in the yard and saw Rick patting Ruddy.

"Hello there!" called Sig. "Where'd you get my dog, Rick?"

"*Your* dog?" cried the boy, and his heart seemed to stop beating for a second. "Is—is this *your* dog?"

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CHAPTER IV RUDDY'S FIRST HUNT

Anxiously Rick waited for an answer from the coast guard. Ruddy who was standing beside the boy, cocked up his ears and sniffed the air that was blowing from the man toward that sensitive animal nose. Once Ruddy (or any dog, for that matter) had smelled a person, he never forgot. Years afterward Ruddy would remember that person's smell, and know whether he was a friend or enemy. And Ruddy knew he had smelled this man before.

With the remembrance was both pleasure and something of pain. The pleasure was in the joyous memory of the bit of bread and meat the coast guard had given the dog. The pain came when Ruddy recalled how he was driven away—or at least he thought he was. But we know that the coast guard was only telling the puppy to shelter himself from the storm.

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And then, in that wonderful manner dogs have of really knowing that men's ways are not their ways, and that sometimes a man makes a dog do something for the animal's good that the creature would rather not do—somehow, in this manner Ruddy knew that the coast guard was to be numbered among his new friends.

Back and forth wagged the expressive tail, and, with a joyful bark, Ruddy bounded toward the man who had been out in the storm all night on the lonely beach. Ruddy was beginning a new life, and the guard and the boy were the first two important things in it.

"Is—is he really your dog?" asked Rick again, slowly.

"Well, don't you see how he comes to me?" asked Sig with a laugh, as he patted the brown head. "I found him last night. Washed off some wreck, I reckon. I gave him a bit of my snack, and then I got more from Bill Park. Told the pup to wait up among the dunes for me, where the wind didn't blow so hard, but he must have run along for I didn't see him after that."

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"He—he came right here to me," spoke Rick. "I—I wanted a dog a long while. I—I prayed for him and he came. But if—if he's your dog, Mr. Bailey—"

"Oh, shucks! He isn't my dog; that is special!" exclaimed the coast guard. He really had no idea of claiming Ruddy, but was only teasing Rick. And when he saw how badly the boy felt, Sig had not the heart to keep up the little fun he was having.

"I don't want him," the coast guard went on. "Course he's a nice pup, but my wife's got a cat, and they might not get along good together. As I say, I saw him on the beach in the storm last night."

Must have been washed off some craft, and he swam ashore. Keep him for all of me!"

"Oh, thanks! Thanks!" cried Rick. "Oh, he's my dog after all! He's mine! Did you hear, mother!" he exclaimed. "He's a dog from the ocean, just like Mazie said, and he's mine!"

Again Rick threw his arms about the wiggling, brown puppy whose tail was wagging so joyously. Ruddy knew when he was loved, and he began to have great hopes for the future. Surely a happier day was dawning for him. [Pg 46]

"Did you really find the dog on the beach?" asked Mr. Dalton, as he came out to go to work.

"Yes, he's a regular sea-dog!" laughed the guard. "Poor pup! He doesn't look as if he'd had a very good time. Seems sort of thin!"

"Yes, he does need filling out," agreed Mr. Dalton, with a glance at Ruddy's ribs that plainly showed through the thin sides. "Well, we'll keep him for a day or so, anyhow."

"Can't I keep him always, Dad?" asked Rick.

"I don't know. Better settle that with your mother," was the answer. "I don't mind having a dog, 'specially such a nice one as this seems to be. But my wife's sort of afraid about Mazie and a dog," he added to the coast guard.

"A good dog doesn't bite—that is bite children," declared Mr. Bailey. "It's queer how even a dog that's surly and snappy to strangers will let a baby pull his tail and ears, and never so much as growl. If you like dogs I'd let Rick keep this one. You won't have any trouble about him biting Mazie." [Pg 47]

And the little girl herself, coming out just then, seemed to have no fear of her brother's new pet. For she put her arms around the neck of Ruddy and he nestled his head close against her.

"My! What a lot of friends I'm making all of a sudden!" said Ruddy to himself, in a way all dogs have of thinking.

"Where you going to keep your pet when you go to school?" asked Mr. Dalton of his son. "We haven't a good place for a dog."

"He can sleep in the box where I used to keep my rabbits," Rick answered. "I'll make it into a kennel for him."

"Yes, that might answer," agreed Mr. Dalton. "I'll help you fix it up when I come home to-night. If we're going to keep a dog we must keep him right—give him a warm, clean kennel to start with. And be sure he has plenty of water, Rick. Dogs need more water than lots of other animals. Give him fresh water three or four times a day." [Pg 48]

"I guess he got plenty of *salt* water, swimming in through the waves last night," spoke the coast guard, as he walked on toward his home. "A little bit of fresh would be a change for him."

Ruddy was thirsty, and he quickly lapped up the water that Rick brought to him in a clean basin. And how glad Ruddy was that the water was *clean*. All animals, even pigs, love to be clean and to have clean food, just as much as we do.

"Are you going to let Rick keep this dog?" asked Mrs. Dalton, as she came out in the yard, and watched Ruddy following Rick and Mazie about in the grass.

"Well, we might try it," said her husband slowly. "He appears like a nice, clean puppy. And a boy and dog seem to go together, somehow."

"But Mazie—" began the mother.

"I guess she likes him as much as Rick does. Let him stay a while. If he makes trouble, of course we'll have to get rid of him," he added in a low voice. "But we'll give Rick and Ruddy a chance together. Quite a team they make—Rick and Ruddy!" and he smiled as he saw the boy toss a stick, which Ruddy ran after and brought back to his little master. [Pg 49]

"Well, I hope it will be all right," said Mrs. Dalton, with something like a sigh. "And he does seem like a nice dog. Come, Rick!" she called. "Time to get ready for school!"

"Yes'm!" answered the boy, and he came running in more promptly than he sometimes did. Somehow Rick felt that if he were to be allowed to keep the dog he must be "on his mark," and give no chance for complaints.

"I'll tie him up so he won't run after me," Rick said. "You'll feed him and give him water while I'm gone; won't you, Mother?" he asked.

"Yes, I'll look after him," promised Mrs. Dalton. "But don't be thinking so much of your new dog that you forget your lessons."

"Oh, he really *is* my dog; isn't he?" exclaimed Rick in delight. "I always wanted a dog but I never thought I'd get one. Now I have! Yes, I'll study good and hard to-day!" he promised. [Pg 50]

Ruddy did not take very kindly to being tied to the side of the box in which Rick had once kept some pet rabbits. At first the dog tried to pull loose from the soft rope about his neck, and follow Rick and Mazie, who soon went down the street together to school. But Ruddy knew what it was

to be tied up, though not since the happy days of his early puppyhood had he so wanted to break away and follow the beloved boy-master as he wanted to follow now.

"Stay there! I'll come back soon!" called Rick, as he turned for a last look at his new pet.

"Yes, and I'll come, too!" added Mazie. "I can like your dog; can't I, Rick?" she asked.

"Sure!" answered her brother. "We'll both like him and he'll like us, and he won't bite you, Mazie."

"I'm not afraid," she said.

Ruddy pulled and tugged at the rope once or twice and then, giving a sad little howl and whine, as if saying he would make the best of it, he began to look about his new home. [Pg 51]

The first thing Ruddy noticed was the rabbit smell—the smell of wild creatures—about his kennel. For though Rick's rabbits were tame, still they had had that smell of the wild, of the open fields and the thick woods—a smell that made Ruddy want to tear loose and go racing among the trees, scattering the dried leaves about. Ruddy had never hunted wild things, but, coming from a race of hunting dogs, the feeling was there in his blood. He whimpered and whined as he smelt about the cracks of the box. He was trying to understand where the rabbits had gone, for they were not in sight, though the smell remained.

Then, as Rick's mother came out with some pieces of carpet to make a bed for the puppy, and as she gave him a large bone on which to gnaw, Ruddy forgot about the rabbits for the time.

The bone interested him more. It was a large bone, with very little meat on it, and what there was took a deal of gnawing to get off. But that was good for Ruddy, whether he knew it or not, for it made his teeth stronger. The more a dog gnaws the better his teeth become, and a dog's teeth are the only weapons he has. A cat has claws and also teeth, but a dog's claws are of scarcely any use to drive away anything that attacks him. He has only his teeth. [Pg 52]

So Ruddy gnawed the bone, drank a little of the fresh water and then he settled himself for a sleep. Around and around he turned on the piece of carpet Mrs. Dalton had spread in his kennel. Just as the old wolf-dogs and jungle hounds had turned around and around to drive out any stray snakes, so Ruddy turned. And then he went to sleep, waiting for Rick to come home from school.

As for Rick, I'm afraid he didn't study quite as well as he might have done if he had not been thinking so much about his dog. Once, during the day, he wrote a note, and tossed it to his chum, Chot Benson.

"I got a dog!"

That was what Rick's note said.

"Where did you get him? Is he a hunting dog?" asked Chot in his answering note. [Pg 53]

Then, before Rick had a chance to flip over an answer in reply, the teacher saw what was going on, and, as it was against the rule to pass notes in school, both boys had to stay in five minutes after the others had left the class room. It was because of this that Mazie reached home before her brother. And, not stopping to go in the house, she hurried to the back yard.

"Ruddy! Ruddy! Where are you?" she called.

With a joyful yelp and bark the dog came from inside the kennel, wagging his tail until it thumped against the sides like the sticks of a drum.

Happy and joyous, Ruddy leaped about Mazie as far as his rope would let him, and the little girl was trying to loosen it from around his neck when her brother and Chot, released at last from their punishment, came racing into the yard.

"There's my dog!" cried Rick, pointing to Ruddy, who was leaping and jumping, trying to get as close as possible to his new master. [Pg 54]

"Say, he's a good one all right!" declared Chot, after looking Ruddy over. "He's a hunting dog!"

"Is he?" asked Rick.

"Sure! You can tell by his ears. He's got almost regular hound dog ears, and hounds are hunting dogs." Chot was a bit wrong about Ruddy's ears, however. They were not those of a hound.

"He's a nice dog, and I like him!" declared Mazie. "Look how funny he's smelling of you, Chot."

Ruddy was, indeed, sniffing around the legs of the new boy. But that was so Ruddy would know Rick's friend again. Ruddy could not depend on his eyes. He might not see Chot some day when he passed his master's chum, and Ruddy wanted to know, and be known, by all Rick's friends. So, now, in the back part of his head, where he could always get at it with his nose, Ruddy was putting away, so he could remember it, a little part of the mysterious man-smell that made Chot different from every other boy.

It was as if you should write on a paper the names of your different friends, so you would not forget them when you met them again. But, as dogs can not write, they have to carry in their heads and noses the memory of the smell of their friends. So Ruddy was getting to know Chot. [Pg 55]

Rick loosed the rope from his pet's neck, and now Ruddy could frisk about as much as he pleased. He was leaping around the two boys, while Mazie went in the house to change her dress, when, all at once, Ruddy caught a whiff of something that always set him half wild. It was the smell of cat, and he, like all dogs, was always ready to chase a cat.

A gray tabby, who lived next door to the Dalton family, had jumped over the fence. Very often this cat found bits of good things to eat in the Dalton garbage can. So Sallie, as the cat was called, came to get something to eat. She did not know Ruddy was there. Never before had the Daltons kept a dog.

But, in an instant, Ruddy was ready for his first real hunt. He had never chased a cat before, though once one had chased him. And now, with a joyful yelp and bark, Ruddy started running after Sallie.

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CHAPTER V RICK GETS LOST

"Look at him go! Look at him go! Oh, he's a hunting dog all right!" yelled Chot, as he saw Rick's pet leap after the cat. "Oh, look at him go! Sic her, old boy! Sic her!"

Neither Rick nor Chot were cruel boys. They would not have harmed Sallie for anything, and they would not have let Ruddy hurt the gray cat. But they could not help wanting to see whether the cat would get to the fence first, or whether Ruddy would win the race. If Ruddy should happen to catch the cat—well, then Rick and Chot were ready to stop the puppy from doing her any harm. But if he should not—why, then it was a good race between a dog and a cat—that was all.

You may well believe that Sallie ran as fast as she could. She knew a lot about dogs—she knew that dogs, almost always, chased cats as they probably always will—just why I do not know. And Sallie ran as fast as she could.

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It is not very hard for a cat to get away from a dog. Fear seems to give the cat greater speed and then, too, there is always a chance of climbing a fence or a tree. A cat can easily get up in a tree, though it can not always so easily get down again. And very few dogs can climb trees. I have seen moving pictures of African hunting dogs getting up in low trees after panthers, but these trees were covered with branches close to the ground, so a dog could really leap up among them. No dog can climb a straight tree trunk, but a cat easily does this.

And the reason for this is that a cat's claws are sharper than a dog's, and they are what are called "retractile." That is they can be pushed out and drawn in again. If you have ever taken pussy's paw, and gently pressed it, you have seen her claws come out from the little sheaths, or pockets of skin, in which they are kept under her fur. Sometimes you can press them out, and sometimes, especially after pussy awakens after a nap, you may see her stick out her claws herself and pull them in again.

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Because of this, and because her claws are sharp, a cat can really climb a tree, just as the telephone lineman climbs a pole by sticking his sharp iron spurs in it. The cat sticks her claws in the soft bark of a tree.

If a dog's claws were sharp he might climb a tree, but they are not. A dog's claws always stick out; he can not put them out when he pleases and pull them back again, as pussy can. And because a dog's claws are always out they get worn off, and dull, as he runs around on the ground.

On raced Sallie and Ruddy raced after her, and soon, coming to a tree, up the cat shot like a flash of light. She reached a limb and sat down on it, her tail big and fluffy, her back arched and her heart beating fast.

Ruddy reached the foot of the tree and there he had to stop. He could not climb. He just sat there, looking up at Sallie and barked. And the cat knew the dog could not get her. She was safe as long as she stayed in the tree.

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"He sure is a hunting dog all right!" exclaimed Chot, as he and Rick ran along after Ruddy.

"He can run pretty fast, but Sallie beat him," spoke Rick.

"Some day we'll take your dog out in the woods and have him chase rabbits," went on Chot. "If he's a hunting dog, and I guess he is, he can catch rabbits."

"I wouldn't want him to hurt any rabbits," spoke Rick. "I used to have some rabbits, once, but I let 'em loose in the woods back of the lake, and maybe they're living there yet. I wouldn't want Ruddy to chase any of the rabbits that I used to have for pets."

"No, course we wouldn't 'zactly want Ruddy to *hurt* any rabbits," agreed Chot. "But we could just watch him run after 'em, same as he ran after Sallie. Your dog'll be a good hunter when he grows up. Where'd you get him?"

"Oh, he just sort of came," answered Rick. "Mr. Bailey saw him swim ashore in the storm last night."

"Well, he's a good dog," declared Chot, patting Ruddy on the head. The dog was dividing his time, now, between barking at the cat and leaping about the boys. He had made friends with Chot almost at once.

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"Come on," said Chot, after a while. "This is no fun. That cat won't come down as long as we stay here."

"What'll we do?" asked Rick, who, to tell the truth, was glad his dog had not caught Sallie.

"Let's have your dog chase sticks," suggested Chot.

"Yes, that'll be fun!" agreed Rick.

The boys raced off across the yard, with the reddish-brown setter leaping and barking after them. Ruddy was the kind of a dog known as a "setter"; that is a sort of bird, or hunting, dog.

Rick found a stick, held it up so Ruddy could see it, and then threw it as far as he could, off in the grass.

"Hi! Fetch it back, Ruddy!" called the boy. Ruddy's legs seemed to work on springs as he raced across the yard. It took him only a moment to discover the stick. He located it by smelling, for he could not see it in the deep grass. The stick had a bark smell of its own, but it also had the smell of Rick's hands—the boy-smell that Ruddy had soon come to know so well. Once Ruddy had this smell of his young master well fixed in his wonderful dog's nose, Ruddy never forgot it. And anything that Rick touched, even the sticks and stones that he threw, had, for Ruddy, that wonderful individual smell by which he could tell his master even without seeing him.

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And so, throwing sticks for Ruddy to run after and bring back to them, Rick, Ruddy and Chot had fun together.

Not far from Rick's house ran a little stream called Weed River. It really was almost too small for a river, but that is what it was called. There were so many weeds in it, at certain times of the year, that it had been given this name. And, because of the weeds, ducks liked to swim in the river, for ducks eat weeds, and also snails and other small creatures that live on, or among, the grasses under water.

Weed River ran into Silver Lake, on which there were swans, which were like big white geese. And farther off, back of Silver Lake, was a patch of woods. It was in these woods that Rick had let his pet rabbits run away when he grew tired of keeping them.

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"We'll throw sticks in the water and Ruddy will bring 'em back to us," proposed Rick.

"Yes," agreed Chot, "and maybe, some day, we can build a raft, and go sailing down the river and into the lake and we can take your dog with us and make believe we're looking for a new land, like it tells about in our school history books."

"I guess there aren't any new lands," said Rick. "They all have been discovered."

"Well, we can make believe to find some, and anyhow it will be fun with your dog," went on Chot. "Come on!"

Ruddy was as ready as anyone to have fun, and now he ran along after the boys, leaping and barking. He had forgotten all about Sallie, the gray cat.

"I can chase her some other time," he said to himself. "That is if I want to. Maybe I'll be friends with her and not chase her. But I guess all dogs have to chase cats."

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There was one cat, though, at the place where Ruddy first lived, that neither his father nor his mother had chased. She was quite an old cat, and she would lie down and go to sleep in one of the horse stalls, near the dog's kennel.

"But she was a very old cat, and maybe that's why my father or mother didn't chase her," thought Ruddy. "They used to chase other cats I remember, so I guess I'd better chase Sallie if I get a chance, until she gets a little older, or until I get to know her better. But I won't hurt her."

But, as I said, Ruddy was having too much fun, now, with Rick and Chot to think of cats. The boys gathered up some sticks, and going down to the edge of the river, tossed the bits of wood into the water.

"Go get 'em!" cried Rick to Ruddy.

Just as though he had always known man or boy talk, Ruddy jumped into the stream and swam out. It was not easy, as the weeds were so thick, but he managed to do it, and he brought the sticks back to shore.

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"Good boy!" cried Rick, patting his pet on the head.

"He's a fast swimmer," said Chot. "Oh, look! He got me all wet!"

For Ruddy, like all dogs when they come from a swim, had given himself a hard shake. And, as he happened to be near Chot when he did this, Ruddy scattered water from his shaggy coat all over the boy.

"But I don't care—I got on my old clothes," Chot said. "Now let him bring back my club, Rick."

It was Chot's turn to toss a piece of wood into the water, and Ruddy brought that back as quickly as he had brought one back for his master.

Down the river, walking along the bank, the boys hurried toward Silver Lake, and, as it happened, there were a number of ducks feeding at the place where the two bodies of water came together. The ducks belonged to a man who lived near by.

"Bow-wow!" barked Ruddy, as soon as he saw the ducks. "Bow wow!"

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Somehow away back in his head was a desire to chase these ducks. Other dogs in Ruddy's family had always raced thus after birds; for he was a setter, or dog that is often used in hunting. And, though Ruddy had never gone hunting, feeling too young up to now, he knew just how to do it. Chasing the cat had been one kind of a hunt, and now here were a lot of queer birds that looked just as if they needed chasing. That would be another hunt.

And so into the water sprang Ruddy, and straight for the tame ducks he rushed, splashing his way along.

"Say, he sure is a smart hunter dog!" cried Chot.

"Yes, but if he chases these tame ducks my mother won't let me keep him," said Rick. "Come on back here, Ruddy! Come back!" he called to his dog. "Leave the ducks alone!"

But Ruddy was too excited over the chase to mind just then. With joyous, eager barks he splashed into the water, and the ducks, though tame, did just what any wild ducks would have done. They scattered with many loud quackings, some even flying, they were so frightened; though a tame duck can not easily use its wings much. But some of these ducks flew up and out of the way.

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"Come back here! Come back!" yelled Rick.

And then, more because the ducks were out of his reach than because he heard his master calling, Ruddy came back. Up he came, all wet, his mouth open and his tongue hanging out, and he was panting hard. That is how a dog cools off, or perspires—by opening his mouth and letting his tongue hang out. And that is why, if a dog is muzzled too tightly, it is bad for him. He can not cool off when he is hot.

Shaking the water from his sides and legs, Ruddy jumped up around Rick and Chot, and he barked just as if he were saying:

"There! See what I did! Didn't I scatter those birds fine? Did you see me make 'em fly!"

"You leave those ducks alone!" said Rick to his dog. "Those are tame ducks, not wild ones for you to hunt. Leave 'em alone!"

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He spoke rather sharply to Ruddy, and shook his finger at the dog. That is the best way to tell a dog that he has done wrong. Whipping does little good, and is cruel because a dog can not understand what he is beaten for. But a dog knows the tones of his master's voice better than anything else. And when the master speaks as if he were angry the dog knows, and remembers.

"Well, well! This is queer!" thought Ruddy as Rick scolded him. "Here I thought I was doing him a favor by chasing those birds, and he doesn't like it. I can tell by the way he talks that he doesn't like it. I wonder why? Well, I don't want to chase them if he doesn't want me to, though I think it's fun!"

So, with another bark or two, Ruddy gave up racing after the ducks, which, with ruffled feathers and after many frightened quacks, settled down on the water again.

Rick, Ruddy and Chot had lots of fun that afternoon, the boys throwing sticks in the water and the dog bringing them back. Ruddy thought he had never before met two such nice chaps as his master and the latter's chum, and never were there such a nice places as Belemere, Weed River and Silver Lake.

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At last it was time for Rick and Chot to go back home. It was nearly the hour for supper. Ruddy knew that as well as the boys did, for the puppy was getting hungry, too.

"I'll be over after supper," called Chot to Rick, as they parted at the gate. "We'll have some more fun with your dog."

Ruddy was tied up in his kennel again. He did not like that very much, but Rick's mother said if the dog were going to be kept he must be made to know his place, especially at mealtime.

"I'll feed him in the same spot at the same hours each day, and he will learn to know when it is time for him to have his breakfast, dinner or supper," said Mrs. Dalton. "Regular habits are as good for a dog as they are for a boy, I should think."

So, though Ruddy did not like it, he was tied up until after Rick and Mazie had eaten their supper. Then Ruddy had his meal, and very good it tasted.

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"Now for some more fun!" cried Rick, as Chot came over, and the two boys and the dog played in the yard until it was dark and time to go to bed.

So it was that Ruddy found a new home, and one he liked very much. The next day Mr. Dalton made the old rabbit house over into a fine kennel for Ruddy, and Rick got a collar and chain for

his dog, so Ruddy could be made fast when it was needful. Ruddy did not like being chained up, but there were times when it was best for him to be kept from running wherever he liked.

Sig Bailey, the coast guard, came over several times to see Ruddy, and the dog knew him every time. They were good friends.

"I said that was a fine dog, as soon ever as I saw him come ashore on the beach in that storm," said the guard. "And he is a fine dog; isn't he, Rick?"

"He surely is!" declared the boy. "I hope nobody ever comes along and says he's theirs."

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"Oh, I don't believe anybody will ever come," spoke Mr. Bailey. "I guess he's your dog to keep now, Rick."

And Rick certainly hoped so.

It was about two weeks after he had become the owner of Ruddy that Rick went, one day, wandering in the woods on the other side of Silver Lake. It was Saturday, when there was no school, and Chot had told Rick he would meet him in the patch of forest. The boys were going to pretend they were hunters, with sticks for guns, and Ruddy for their hunting dog. Ruddy was real, of course, but the guns were make believe.

Rick had been several times to the woods, but he had never gone very far into their somewhat dark depths. To-day, when he had not met Chot soon after getting among the trees, Rick walked on and on, and, the first thing he knew he could see nothing around him but the thick trunks and tangled bushes. All the houses were out of sight, and he could not even find the road, or path, by which he had come in.

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"Chot! Chot! Where are you?" cried Rick. "Where are you?"

But the boy he had expected to meet in the woods was not there. Later Rick learned that his chum had been sent on an errand by his mother, and so did not get to the woods at all that day.

"I guess I'd better go back home," said Rick to himself, as he saw how late it was getting. "It'll soon be night. Come on, Ruddy!"

The dog, who was nosing among the leaves under a fallen log, sprang away at his master's voice and trotted along behind Rick.

"We're going home!" Rick said.

"Bow wow!" answered Ruddy, which was as much as to say: "That suits me!"

But, somehow or other, as Rick walked along, he did not seem to be getting any nearer home. The woods had a strange look, and, as he glanced about, a great fear came to him.

"Ruddy," said Rick, with a catch in his voice, "I'm lost!"

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CHAPTER VI

HAW-HAW THE CROW

Ruddy, the dog, looked up into the face of Rick, the boy. If Ruddy could have talked boy language he would have asked:

"What's the matter? Why are you stopping here instead of running along among the leaves? Come on, have a race! It's lots of fun! Throw a stick and I'll go after it!"

That was what Rick and Ruddy had been doing before Rick began to notice how late it was, or to think about how far he was from home, and to realize that he had not met his chum, Chot. Chot, whose real name was Charlie, was a little older than Rick, and knew his way better in the woods near Weed River and Silver Lake than did Rick.

"Ruddy, I—I guess we're lost," said Rick again.

"Bow-wow!" barked Ruddy. That was all he said that Rick could hear, and, in a way, the boy understood what that talk meant.

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It was as if Ruddy had remarked:

"All right! I'm not afraid as long as I'm with you!"

For though often dogs may become frightened, because of some danger, they hardly ever show any sign of fear when they are with their master—be he a boy or man. It was as if the dog felt its master knew everything, and could get him, or any other dog, out of trouble.

And besides barking, Ruddy was talking in a language Rick could not even hear, much less understand, though, later on, he grew to know what his dog meant when he stood with head turned on the side, one ear cocked a little forward and such a sharp look on his face. After he had barked once, to say, in dog talk: "All right!" Ruddy had gone on saying, in his silent, animal way:

"Don't worry, little master, I've been lost lots of times, and I always found myself. Leave it to me!"

I'll get you home all right!"

But Rick did not know this, and, for a time, Ruddy did not really think that Rick was worried or frightened. The dog had had such fun in the woods, playing with the boy, that he wanted to keep it up. Ruddy wanted to rustle through the dried leaves. He liked to hear the rattling sound they made. He wanted to chase more sticks, but Rick did not throw any.

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"Ruddy, which way is home?" asked Rick, as he stood in the woods, and looked about him. "Where do we live?"

Ruddy could not quite get this thought. He looked at Rick, and he saw that his master was now beginning to be troubled. Dogs know when a person is in trouble more often than you think, and they can sympathize, or be sorry, for their master and others. But Ruddy was only a puppy and his thinking-out of things was not as clear as it became afterward. Just now he reasoned perhaps his master wanted to have some fun in a new way.

"Well, if he does," thought Ruddy to himself, "there are lots of games I haven't played with him yet. He doesn't care for chasing cats, so I'll find something else to chase. There are birds in these woods, I'll chase some of them!"

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Giving a few short barks, and scrabbling about in the leaves, Ruddy leaped up and down in front of Rick. This was an invitation to come and play tag. Ruddy knew how to give that invitation, and he had often done it. That was one of the first games he had learned to play when he lived in the stable with his father and mother and the other little puppies.

"No, Ruddy," said Rick, as he saw his dog leaping about. "I don't want to do that now. Let's go home, Ruddy! Let's go home! I don't know the way, but maybe you do! Let's go home!"

Ruddy knew what that word "home" meant. Once or twice, when he had been tied up, as Rick and Mazie were about to start for school, the dog had broken loose and run after the master he loved so well. Then Rick would turn about and say, very sternly:

"Go home, Ruddy! Go back home!"

He would point to the house, and, with a sad look and with drooping tail, the red-brown puppy would slink back. He was a good dog to mind, was Ruddy.

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But now Rick was using the word "home" in a different way. Ruddy hardly understood. Rick had not spoken sternly. He was asking Ruddy a question—asking him to find the home that, somehow or other, Rick had lost sight of in the woods.

"Let's go home, Ruddy! Let's go home!" said Rick, over and over.

Still Ruddy did not understand. He leaped about, pawing aside the dried leaves. He was trying to find another box tortoise. Once he had uncovered a tortoise in the woods, and Rick had taken it home. That had been a great discovery for Ruddy.

"Maybe I can find another one of those funny, crawling things, that look like a stone, and which pull in their legs, head and tail as soon as I bark at them," thought Ruddy as he pawed among the leaves. "I'll try to find another. Maybe that's what Rick wants."

"No, I don't want anything like that!" said Rick, as he saw what his dog was doing. "No more turtles, Ruddy. Let's go home! I don't know which way it is, or I'd go. I'm all turned around, and if I go the wrong way I'll be more lost than I am now. Where is home, Ruddy?"

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Rick was getting more and more uneasy. He was not exactly frightened, for he had often read of people becoming lost and spending a night in the woods.

"I won't mind that so much as long as Ruddy is with me," thought the boy. "But I'd rather be home. Maybe I can make Chot hear me now!"

He called and called again, Ruddy mingling his bark with the voice of his master. And though Rick seemed to call more loudly than did Ruddy, the dog's bark was heard farther. It is said that the bark of a dog can be heard farther than any other sound, and men who have gone up in balloons say that the last sounds that come to them, from the earth below, that seems to be dropping away beneath them, are the barkings of dogs. A dog's bark can be heard several miles.

But though Ruddy's bark was carried farther through the woods than was Rick's calling, those who heard Ruddy's "bow-wows" did not pay any attention to them. A dog barks so often, and so much, that few persons give any heed to it. All barks are alike to them, though there are really several different kinds, and each one means something different in dog language.

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"It's no use," said Rick, after he had called aloud and shouted several times. "I guess Chot didn't come, or else he's lost too. We're both lost! I wonder what I can do to get home?"

He sat down on a log. Ruddy came up and put his cold nose close to Rick's face. As plainly as he could the dog was asking:

"What's the matter? Can't I help?"

"I want to go home, Ruddy! I want to go home!" said Rick. If he had been an older boy he might have started off by himself and have tried to find his home. But he was afraid of going the wrong way now. If only Ruddy would lead him!

As for the dog, if he had been by himself he would, as soon as he was ready, have trotted off in the direction of Belemere, and have gone straight to Rick's house. Once a dog has settled himself in a home he can, nearly always, find his way back to it, and sometimes even when he has been taken many miles away, in an automobile or a train. But, just now, Ruddy did not know that Rick wanted to go home.

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"I guess he wants me to scare up a bird for him to chase," thought Ruddy, dog-fashion, of course. "That is the kind of fun he wants. There's no fun sitting on a log and doing nothing. I'll chase a bird!"

Several times that day, on their walk through the woods, Ruddy had scrambled among the bushes and frightened out birds who were perched on the low branches of trees. Ruddy was a hunting dog and, in times past, the members of his family had thus driven birds out into the open for hunters to shoot at. Ruddy did not quite understand why Rick did not shoot at these birds. But of course Rick would not do that, even if he had had a gun; which he had not.

"I'll scare up some other birds," said Ruddy to himself. "That's what he must want."

With a cheerful bark, he plunged in among the bushes. Several birds flew out, and Ruddy barked all the louder. But instead of chasing after these fluttering creatures, as the dog expected he would, Rick sat on the log.

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"Bow-wow!" barked Ruddy.

That meant, as plainly as he could say it:

"Come on! Help me catch a bird!"

"No! None of that," said Rick. "We must go home, Ruddy. Where is home, Ruddy?"

It took the dog some little time to find out what his master really wanted, and then it came to Ruddy in a flash. But perhaps it was more because the dog, himself, was getting hungry, and knew it was time for his supper to be given him in his kennel. He knew where that was, of course. That was "home" to him, and now he began to feel that it was time to go there.

Ruddy circled about in the leaves. His nose was close to the ground, and many smells came to him. Here a rabbit had leaped along, and over there a squirrel had jumped to the ground after a nut that had fallen from a tree. Ruddy knew these smells very well indeed, and another time he would have followed them along until he had come to where the rabbit was in his burrow, or the squirrel was perched high in some hollow tree.

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But Ruddy had something else to do now. He was smelling among the leaves to catch the scent that led back along the way he and Rick had come—the trail back home—that is what Ruddy was smelling for. In a few moments it came to him. He knew he could find it when he wanted it, and here it was—through the clump of pines, down past where the willows drooped over the brook, up the hill, down a little hollow and then out on the road past Silver Lake and Weed River—that was the way home.

Ruddy knew it, even if Rick did not. With a bark the dog began to lead the way.

"Bow-wow!" he said again, and this time it was quite a different bark. It was as if he said:

"Come along, Master! Now I know what you want! Home, of course! I'll lead you home. I know the path very well!"

Ruddy ran on ahead a little way and then turned around and waited for Rick to come to him. This time the boy understood. His dog was not playing in the leaves now, flushing birds or digging for turtles.

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"Home, Ruddy! Home!" said Rick.

And straight toward home Ruddy led Rick.

As the two walked on, Ruddy keeping a little ahead all the while, it grew darker. Night was fast settling down, though it would be lighter once they were out from among the trees. As they neared the edge of the woods Rick halted and looked about.

"Maybe Chot is in here, and he may be lost, too," he thought. "I'd better call him."

So he did, and Ruddy joined in with loud barks, but the other boy did not answer. As Rick learned, later, Chot had not gone to the woods at all. So, after waiting a bit, and calling once or twice, Ruddy helping, Rick walked on with his dog.

Suddenly, as they were nearing a path, which Rick remembered now as the one he had followed into the woods, Ruddy, with a loud bark, sprang toward something that fluttered among the low branches of a tree.

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A black object flew out, uttering a loud:

"Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"A crow!" cried Rick. "It's a crow!"

And so it was. Again sounded the loud:

"Haw! Haw! Haw!"

Crows really utter that cry, rather than "Caw!" as most persons think. Listen the next time you hear crows, and see if this is not so.

"Bow-wow!" barked the dog.

"Haw! Haw!" croaked the crow.

It fluttered on through the bushes and then fell to the ground.

"Its wing is broken!" cried Rick. "Somebody must have shot it, and it can't fly!"

With an eager bark Ruddy rushed toward the bird which was scrabbling around among the leaves in a little hollow on the ground. The crow seemed to be all tired out, and could not even flutter now. Rick cried aloud:

"Don't kill it, Ruddy! Don't kill it!"

He rushed up to save the black bird, hardly knowing why he was doing it, for he had been told, with truth, that crows eat the eggs of other, and better birds, as well as destroy the farmer's corn. [Pg 84]

"Maybe I can tame this crow and get him to talk," said Rick. "Down, Ruddy! Down!"

The dog knew what this meant. He stopped barking; he stopped trying to bite the crow, and stood off to one side. Careful to keep his hands away from the sharp, strong beak, Rick picked up the crow. It was a young one, and a drooping wing showed it was hurt.

"You're going to be my crow!" said Rick. "I'll call you Haw-Haw, and take you home. Ruddy, don't hurt this crow! I'm going to tame him!"

He held the black bird out in his hands for Ruddy to look at.

"Haw! Haw!" the crow cried, rather feebly.

"Bow-wow!" barked Ruddy.

Perhaps they were talking to one another in that mysterious animal language. At any rate Ruddy seemed to understand what Rick had said, and never after that did he try to hurt Haw-Haw. As for the crow—well, I'll tell you more about him presently. [Pg 85]



Rick picked up the crow!

"Now we got to go home, Ruddy," said Rick. "Mother will be worried about me. We got to go home!"

And Ruddy, holding his head on one side, looked at Rick and at Haw-Haw and then, with a short bark, led the way out of the woods, and along the path to Belemere.

"Now we're all right," said Rick to himself. "I'm not lost any more, and I've got a new pet! I

wonder if you'll talk?" he asked the crow with the broken wing.

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CHAPTER VII WHY DID RUDDY GROWL?

Rick and Ruddy tramped together along the path that led out of the woods, Rick carrying the crow, which he had already named Haw-Haw. The black bird, wild at first when the boy had taken it up, was now more quiet, as Rick held it under one arm. But Rick could feel its heart beating fast beneath the glossy feathers.

Ruddy trotted along, now and then looking up at his master, as if trying to guess what it was all about. Perhaps the setter was wondering if Rick, in caring for this new, strange pet, would no longer go on romps and tramps in the woods with the dog who so loved to be among the trees and the dried leaves, looking for birds.

It was the nature of Ruddy to hunt birds, not for himself but for whoever was his master. So, in a way, it seemed perfectly right for Rick to be taking home this bird, even if it was only a crow.

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Ruddy was an Irish setter, one of the three varieties of setter dogs much used for hunting. Ruddy's coat was like his name, a rich dark red in color. The Gordon setter has a black coat, marked with dark brown, and the English setter is nearly white, with mottled spots of different color.

A hundred years ago, when men used to spread nets to catch birds, when they could not shoot them because they had not then the right kind of guns, dogs like Ruddy were used to help the hunters. The setters were taught to go in the underbrush, find the game birds, come to a "point"—that is point their noses toward where they saw the quail, grouse or pheasants, and then the dogs crouched down, or "set," as the English hunters called it. That is how the "setter" dog got its name. It would "set," or lie down low, in the grass, so the net of the hunter could be thrown over its head to enmesh the half-hidden birds.

Ruddy had never helped hunt birds with a net, but, years back, his ancestors had, and the name clung to him. So, also, did the love of hunting in the woods. To chase birds, to bark at them, to love to see them scurry away as he ran toward them was as natural to Ruddy as it is natural for a bulldog to hold fast to whatever he gets between his jaws.

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And so, as Ruddy walked along beside Rick, the red setter was thinking:

"Well, my master caught one bird, anyhow. That is doing very well for a starter. Maybe tomorrow we shall go to the woods again, and I'll find more birds for him to catch."

For, really, if it had not been that Ruddy frightened the crow into fluttering off the branch where it had taken refuge, after being shot, Rick might never have found it.

"Dear me! Where have you been?" cried Rick's mother, as he came marching into the yard, carrying the crow and followed by Ruddy.

"I was off in the woods," answered the boy. "And I was lost, but Ruddy showed me the way home."

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"Lost! Oh, Rick! You mustn't go to the woods alone and get lost!"

"I wasn't alone," he answered. "Ruddy was with me. I can't get lost with him. He always will know the way back, I guess. But I didn't see Chot."

"No, he came, after you had gone, to say he couldn't meet you in the woods," said Mrs. Dalton. "I thought you would come right back when you didn't find him. You stayed so long that I was getting afraid. I was just going to send your father after you."

"I was afraid myself," spoke Rick. "But Ruddy is a good dog. He didn't know what I meant first, when I told him to go home, after I couldn't tell where the path was. But, after a while, he knew what I said and he led me straight."

"What you got?" asked Mazie, seeing the black, feathered creature in her brother's hands.

"It's a crow. Ruddy found it and I picked it up before he could bite it. Its wing is broken but maybe we can fix it. I'm going to teach it to talk."

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"Crows don't talk—only parrots," said Mazie.

"Yes, they do—don't crows talk?" asked Rick of his father, who came out in the yard just then.

"Yes, I have heard them say a few words, and also whistle," said Mr. Dalton. "Not all of them talk as well as do parrots, but you can understand some of the things crows say."

"You have to slit their tongues to make 'em talk," went on Rick. "Chot Benson told me so. He doesn't know I got this crow, but I'll tell him after supper. Maybe he knows how to cut their tongues."

"No, you mustn't cut the crow's tongue," said Mr. Dalton. "It is a cruel superstition to say that

slitting a crow's tongue makes it talk. Not all crows can say words, but those that do, will say them just as well with a whole tongue as with one cut down the middle. Leave your crow's tongue alone, Rick, if you are going to keep him."

"Oh, I'm going to keep him!" declared the boy. "I'm going to have him for a pet same as I have Ruddy. But I'm glad I don't have to slit his tongue. Do you think you can fix his broken wing, Daddy?" [Pg 91]

"Well, perhaps we can put it in splints so the bones will grow together," answered his father. "But I'm afraid the crow will never fly again. It may be able to flutter about, and it surely can walk, for its legs are all right," said Mr. Dalton, as he took the black bird from Rick. "But its flying days are over."

"Then it won't fly away from me," said the boy. "I'll make a nest for it in the woodshed, and then I'll teach it to talk."

"That may take you a long time," said his father, "and this may be the sort of crow that never says any words. But you can try."

"And now it's time for supper," exclaimed Rick's mother. "It has been waiting long enough, and it's almost dark."

"Ruddy wants his supper, too," said his master.

"Tie him up and I'll feed him after I feed you," promised Mrs. Dalton with a laugh. Though not very fond of dogs she was beginning to love Rick's pet that had come to him out of the ocean, and Ruddy knew how to appreciate the kindness of his master's mother in giving him clean food and water, and choice bones to gnaw when he had nothing else to do. [Pg 92]

The crow was put in a box filled with soft, dried grass. A tin can of water was hung on the side, so Haw-Haw could reach it without knocking it over. And then he was left to himself in the woodshed. Ruddy was tied in his kennel, and he stretched out with his muzzle between his forepaws, thinking over what had happened that day. It had been one filled with delight and adventures, and Ruddy was wishing, with all his warm, dog's heart, for another day like it.

To Rick the great adventure had been getting lost, but this, to Ruddy, was nothing. The dog had not been lost at all. He knew his way back home all the while.

While Rick, Mazie and the others were eating supper, and Rick was telling all that had happened, and how he found Haw-Haw, his dog lay out in the kennel. It was a soft, warm evening, one of the sort that come in Indian Summer, and Ruddy was sniffing many odors that reached his sharp nose. [Pg 93]

Suddenly he smelled—cat. Quickly his head was raised. Yes, there was a cat who had leaped up on the back fence. It was Sallie from next door. For a moment Ruddy had a wild notion of springing up and chasing after Sallie as he had done that first day he came to live with Rick. Then, as the dog felt the collar about his neck, and as the chain by which he was fastened to the kennel gave a rattle, he knew that it would have been of no use to get up. The chain would stop him after he had gone a few feet.

Ruddy settled back on the ground. The cat—having heard the dog's chain rattle, and knowing the setter could not get her (for Sallie was a wise cat)—did not run away as fast as she had run the other time. Nor did she climb a tree.

Sallie just walked along the fence, to see another cat perhaps, and Ruddy stretched out, sniffing the many odors that came to his fine, sharply-pointed nose. The cat smell passed away with the night wind.

Suddenly, as it grew darker, to the nose of the dog came another smell. It was a smell that made him leap up with a deep growl in his throat. It was the smell Ruddy did not like, for it brought back to him the memory of a man who had been cruel to him—a man who had beaten and kicked him—who had filled his puppy days with misery. [Pg 94]

And now, on the soft airs of the autumn night that terrible man-smell came to Ruddy. He stood up, sniffed again and again, and the growl in his throat became deeper. And to Ruddy there also came the sound of someone walking softly around the yard fence—the footsteps of a man who did not want to be discovered.

The setter leaped to the length of his chain and his growl became a bark. Rick, who was coming out of the house after supper, heard this, and hastened to his dog's kennel. He heard Ruddy rumbling in his throat.

"What's the matter, old fellow? Why are you growling?" asked Rick. Of course the different smells on the night air meant nothing to him. Though a boy's nose is very good for smelling a pie baking in the oven, or, in camp for whiffing the delicious odor of bacon and coffee, a boy's nose is not sharp enough to smell all a dog can smell. [Pg 95]

"What's the matter, Ruddy?" asked Rick again. "Why are you growling?"

Of course Ruddy could not speak boy talk, and so he could not tell what had disturbed him, but he kept on growling.

"If it's a tramp trying to sneak around the house, go drive him away!" ordered Rick.

He loosened the dog's chain and the animal with another bark and growl, darted away in the darkness. Then Rick became fearful lest his new pet should get into danger.

"Come back, Ruddy! Come back!" called the boy.

Ruddy was following that hated odor that lay on the still, night air. He smelled it more plainly now, showing that he was coming nearer to it the farther he went from his new kennel house. Rick was now some distance back.

And then, near a dark clump of bushes, Ruddy came to a sudden stop. The alarming man-smell came from there. Someone was hiding in the bushes—someone Ruddy hated and feared. Again the dog growled. [Pg 96]

And then a voice fairly growled back in answer—the voice of a man hidden in the bushes, and angry words were muttered. They were words Ruddy had heard before, and they had often been followed by a blow or a kick.

Ruddy did not want to be hurt again, and so he decided it would be best not to go any nearer that bush. He growled once more, sniffed the air to make sure of the smell, and turned back. Rick was following.

"What is it? What's the matter, old fellow? Why are you growling?" asked Rick, but Ruddy could not answer, and the boy could neither see nor smell anything in the darkness.

The man in the bushes did not stir. Perhaps he had gone to sleep. Ruddy did not know. And then, with a final growl, the dog turned away and, looking up and back to where he dimly saw Rick's form, he followed the boy.

But once, and once again, Ruddy turned, looked back toward the clump of bushes, and growled low and fiercely. [Pg 97]

"Was it a tramp or a cat?" asked Rick. "Well, if it's a cat it doesn't much matter. And if it's a tramp, maybe he'll know I have a dog, and I guess he won't come too close to our house. Tramps don't like dogs."

And if it had been light, and if Rick and Ruddy had looked back then, they would have seen, peering out from the screen of the bush, an ugly face. It was the face of a ragged man, and the man, as he saw in the darkness the dog and boy moving away, muttered:

"He nearly smelled me out! Wonder what kind of a dog that was? Looked something like the one I want. Well, I can tell better in the mornin'. This is a good place to sleep." And he curled up again.

Several times more Ruddy growled down in his throat, and then something came that made him forget the man in the bush. The man whose smell he so well remembered.

With Ruddy leaping and barking about him, Rick got a lantern and went to look at the broken-winged crow in the woodshed. The black bird did not seem to have moved since it had nestled down amid the soft grass in the box, over which a wire screen had been placed to keep Haw-Haw from fluttering out. [Pg 98]

"To-morrow I will mend your broken wing," said Rick, as he looked at his new pet.

Ruddy, forgetting for the time being about the man smell that came from the bush, stood with head on one side looking wonderingly toward the box where the crow nestled.

"I must fix it so Ruddy won't hurt Haw-Haw by mistake," said Rick. "Look here, old fellow," he said to his dog, and tapping the edge of the box, at which sound the crow moved uneasily. "Look here, Ruddy! You mustn't hurt Haw-Haw. Let him alone! He is my crow and he and you and I are going to be friends. Don't hurt this black bird!"

Ruddy whined. He did not quite understand. Something inside him made him want to take this feathered creature in his mouth and carry it somewhere, as the dogs of his family carried birds from the hunting field. And this was the hunting instinct Ruddy felt. But he knew he must also mind his young master. If Rick said not to touch the crow, the crow must not be touched. And so Ruddy made up his mind he would obey his young master. [Pg 99]

The dog followed the boy out of the woodshed, and the crow was left alone, which was the best thing for the bird at present. Its heart did not beat so wildly when Rick and Ruddy had gone.

"Come on, Ruddy!" called Rick to his dog. "We'll go over and see Chot! I'll tell him how I got lost and found a crow!"

Ruddy was always ready to go anywhere with Rick, and especially over to Chot's house. For next door to Rick's chum lived Tom Martin, whose dog and Ruddy had become great friends. This other dog's name was Peter, and he was a bull terrier, a white dog, with ears like a bat, and queer, sleepy-looking eyes that gave his long face rather a foolish expression. But Peter was a brave dog, and loved his master as much as Ruddy loved Rick. So the two dogs played together, while Rick and Chot talked on the back steps in the soft, warm, fall darkness. [Pg 100]

Ruddy was much larger than Peter, and it was all Peter could do, when Ruddy held his head high, to get hold of one of Ruddy's ears to pull it. But often Peter did this, and then the two dogs would

roll over and over in the grass, pretending to bite one another, but, of course, not really doing it.

"I'm sorry you got lost," said Chot to Rick. "I didn't know you would go so far in the woods if I wasn't there."

"I didn't mean to," spoke Rick. "But I just kept going. But I'll never get lost, now, with Ruddy. He'll bring me home."

"Yes, Ruddy is a good dog."

Hearing his name spoken Ruddy left his play with Peter, and came running to his master, laying his muzzle, or nose, on the boy's knee, and looking up into his face as if to ask:

"What do you want?"

"I didn't call you," said Rick. "But I guess it's time to go home. Come on over and see Haw-Haw, my crow, to-morrow, Chot."

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"I will. I hope he gets to talking."

"So do I!"

Rick and Ruddy raced home together, and soon both were asleep, Rick in his little white bed, and Ruddy out in his kennel, ready to bark if a strange footfall should be heard around the house. For though Ruddy could not see in the dark, even as well as he could in the daytime, which was little enough, his hearing and smelling were perhaps better after dark than in daylight. He would know the moment a stranger came within hearing, or smelling, distance of the house he now called home.

Again and again Ruddy sniffed the night air, during the hours of darkness for any trace of the hated man odor he had smelled. But it did not again come to his nose. Perhaps the wind had changed, for dogs, and most animals, can not smell persons, or other animals, if the wind is blowing away from them. When the wind blows from the animal or person to the dog, then the dog can smell very well indeed.

Or perhaps the ugly-faced man under the bush had gone away after the dog had growled. Ruddy did not know what it was, but he did know that the odor he disliked came to him no more. But he was on the alert for the noise of a strange footstep, or the least whiff of a new smell.

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Mr. Dalton came from the office earlier next day, and with the help of Rick and Chot bound up the crow's broken wing. It was wound about with soft strips of cloth close to the glossy, black feathers of the bird's body.

"There," said Rick's father. "I think the wing will mend, even if Haw-Haw can not use it to fly again. Now we'll give him something to eat, and fresh water, and leave him alone. He's frightened half to death, for he doesn't know yet that we are trying to be kind to him."

Some scraps of meat were given Haw-Haw and he seemed to like them. He nestled down in his box, and there he had to stay for many days, until his broken wing healed, as it did after a while, though not so he could fly with it. He could only flutter lamely about the yard.

Meanwhile Rick and Ruddy had many good times. When he did not have to go to school, the boy went on long walks with his dog, sometimes down to the beach, and again back in the woods or along the river or lake.

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On Silver Lake were a number of swans. They had been bought by the town of Belemere to make the place attractive for summer visitors, and in winter the birds were put in shelters. But now they were still in the open, swimming about the lake, and sometimes in the river, from which they ate the weeds.

Ruddy did not understand these swans. To him they were a sort of goose. But a swan is much larger than a goose and it has powerful wings. It is said a swan can break a man's arm with a sweep of the wing, but I am not sure this is so. At any rate swans defend themselves with their bills, which can nip splinters off a wooden plank, and with their strong wings they can deal hard blows.

Whenever Ruddy could slip away from Rick, the dog used to love to chase these swans. He would rush at them barking loudly, if he saw them preening their feathers, or asleep on the bank of the lake. Then, with wild hissings, the big, white birds would dash for the water. Sometimes they would turn on Ruddy, and almost strike him with their wings. But most times Rick called his dog back as soon as Ruddy made a dash for the half-tame water fowls. Thus there never had been a real fight between the swans and the dog.

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But one day Rick was called back by his mother after he had started for a romp with Ruddy, and the dog went on alone by himself for a while. He approached the lake and there, asleep on the bank, were two swans.

"Bow-wow!" barked Ruddy, making a sudden rush. He expected the white creatures would dash into the water, but they seemed to have made up their minds that they had stood the dog's nonsense long enough. With loud hissings they both turned and with outstretched necks, with open bills, with fluttering and spread wings they flew at Ruddy.

Few dogs would have been brave enough to stand in the face of these strange enemies. Even a bulldog might have turned tail, as Ruddy certainly did.

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Away ran the dog and after him ran the swans. The big, white birds could really travel quite fast, even on land, for they used their wings to help themselves along, just as an ostrich half runs and half flies, which makes him as speedy as some horses.

With hisses and flappings of their wings, the swans pursued Ruddy, and if Rick had seen them after his dog he could easily have guessed what the swans were saying to one another.

"We might as well settle this matter once and for all," one swan might have said.

"I agree with you," the mate probably hissed in answer. "We have no peace or quietness at all, with this dog chasing us at unexpected times. Let's teach him a lesson!"

And that is what they were trying to do—teach Ruddy a lesson. The swans wanted to make Ruddy afraid of them, so he would no longer chase them.

When a cat, I don't mean Sallie, especially, but any cat, wants to teach a dog a lesson, and cause him to fear her, so he will no longer chase her, the cat turns, arches up her back, makes her tail as large as she can, hisses at the dog and scratches his nose if possible. A cat seems to understand that a dog's nose is his most tender spot, as indeed it is. A dog really hates to have his nose scratched as it bothers him, hurts him and prevents him from smelling his best, and on a dog's scent, or sense of smell, nearly everything depends.

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But swans can't scratch. They can pinch with their yellow bills, or, if they are black swans, with their red beaks. And they can deal hard blows with their powerful wings.

And as Ruddy raced along the shore, back toward where he had left Rick, the dog tucked his tail between his hind legs to keep it out of the way. Next to a dog's nose his tail is his most tender part.

Ruddy did not want his tail pinched, or nipped, but that is just what happened. One of the swans managed to get close to the dog, who was running away as fast as he could, and, catching the setter's tail in his strong beak, gave it a hard bite.

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My, how Ruddy howled! He howled more than once, and then he ran so fast and hard that he pulled his tail out of the swan's beak. Ruddy was loose. The swan had done what he hoped to do.

Then the first swan, and all the others, stopped chasing Ruddy. They spread wide their wings to act as brakes, just as an airship man pulls down the tail rudder of his aeroplane to make it travel over the ground more slowly when he has made a landing. Birds, too, when they alight after a fly, spread wide their tails. Just watch them some time.

Then, having, as they hoped, taught Ruddy a lesson, so he would not tease them again, the swans waddled back to the lake.

The setter dog had a queer expression on his face. He held his head on one side, one long, silky ear was cocked up and Ruddy seemed very much surprised by what had happened. In fact he appeared very much ashamed of himself, and animals can be ashamed just as much as can boys or girls. If you have ever seen a cat, sleeping on the edge of a chair, and, perhaps while she was dreaming of something, suddenly slip off to the floor, you know what I mean. The cat is ashamed of having fallen out of bed. It was this way with Ruddy. He was ashamed of having run away from the swans.

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"I wonder what other dogs would think of me if they knew I had run away from a bird?" mused Ruddy. "But of course they were the largest birds I ever saw. I never knew before that birds chased dogs. I thought dogs always chased birds."

You see Ruddy was learning.

Of course Ruddy did not know all there was to be known about birds—that there are some, like eagles and condors, that can pick a big dog up in their claws, or talons, and fly away with him. And Ruddy did not know that there are some birds, like the ostrich or the emu, who are taller than any dog. Ruddy had much to learn, you see, and, just now, he was a little ashamed of himself.

"I wonder," thought Ruddy, in animal fashion, of course, "I wonder what some of the older dogs who used to live in the stable with me would say if they had seen me now? I ran away from some bird! A queer thing to happen to a dog! I wonder what other dogs would say?"

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But I think Ruddy need not have been ashamed. Almost any dog would have run, and turned tail if several big swans had rushed at him. And never after that did the red setter bother the great white birds on the lake. They had taught him a lesson he never forgot.

The days that followed were happy ones for Rick and Ruddy. The boy and dog grew to love each other more and more, and Mrs. Dalton was not sorry the setter had come to live with them. No dog could be more gentle with Mazie, who loved Ruddy as much as did her brother.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE OLD SAILOR

One day, when Sig Bailey, the coast guard, was sitting outside the life-saving station, making a little boat from a piece of wood, he saw a shadow in front of him—a shadow cast on the beach by the bright October sun. The life guard looked up and saw, standing before him, a ragged man on whose face grew scraggily whiskers—not a good, proper beard, but whiskers as though the man ought to have shaved but had been too lazy—or else had not had a chance. If the guard had known, this was the same man Ruddy had smelled and rumbled at.

"Mornin' mate!" growled the ragged man, as he rubbed his rough, scraggy, stubby chin. "Can you give me somethin' to eat?"

Sig looked at the man closely and then answered slowly:

"Well, I guess maybe I can ask the captain to. He's boss here. I'm only one of the crew."

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"Regular ship rules you have around here; eh?" asked the man.

"Something like that—yes," answered Sig. "In winter we all live here at the station, and the captain is in charge. In the summer I live inland, and come on duty at night. But the full crew is here now and—well, I'll see if I can get you anything. Sit down."

The ragged man sat down on the bench outside the coast guard station, while Sig went to find the captain.

Besides the house in which the captain, his wife and the crew lived at the Belemere life-saving station, there was another building in which was stored the motor life-boat, and other things, by means of which passengers and crews were taken off vessels that might go ashore on the beach.

Some of the crew were working about the boat now—painting her and others were looking over the ropes and the bomb-gun by which a line is shot out to a vessel when it is too rough to use the boat. The captain was in the cottage writing out some reports he had to send to Washington.

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"There's a man outside who wants something to eat," said Sig to Captain White.

"What sort of a man is he?"

"Looks like a tramp, but I guess he's been a sailor to judge by his walk."

"Oh, well, we can't turn anyone away hungry; eh, Mother?" he asked his wife, who was busy in the kitchen.

"I can give him a plate of beef stew," she answered.

"Guess that would just about fit in his locker," spoke Sig, with a grin. "I'll take it out to him."

And presently the wanderer was gratefully eating the hot bowl of stew as he sat on the bench beside Sig, who had again started work on making the boat. Sig was going to give the boat to Rick when it was finished.

"Live around here?" asked the life guard of the tramp.

"No. Just drifted in. I've had hard luck ever since I lost my dog."

"Lost your dog!" exclaimed Sig, and a queer feeling came into his heart. "What kind of a dog did you have?"

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"He was sort of reddish—a setter I guess he was. Got washed overboard one night just about off this coast I reckon. We were wrecked ourselves right after that, and I haven't had any luck since. I figger I lost my luck when I lost my dog. Wish I could get him back!"

Sig looked sharply at the ragged man. Could he be after Ruddy?

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CHAPTER IX RUDDY HELPS SALLIE

Eagerly and hungrily the ragged man ate the bowl of meat and broth. Sig watched him until he had finished and set the bowl down on the bench beside him.

"Yes, I've had bad luck ever since I lost my dog," half growled the ragged man. "I found the dog—he was living in an ash barrel down where I stayed near the dock. I took him on the boat with me for luck. Nice little pup he was—sort of brown in color—a dark red. I took him along for luck, but I didn't have any."

"Didn't you?" asked Sig. He was doing some hard thinking. Only that morning he had seen Rick and Ruddy racing along the beach together, and it was hard to say which was the happier—the dog or the boy.

"No, I didn't have any luck," went on the ragged sailor, who was not half as pretty to look at as the flower of that name. "I took that pup with me when I went on the *Mary Jane*—that was the

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name of the schooner. But a storm came up—right when we got off this coast. I was nearly washed overboard myself, and the pup was—completely. I guess he was drowned. No dog could live in that storm. He couldn't get ashore."

The life guard did not answer. He was not sure that Ruddy was the dog the tramp had taken along "for luck" as he said. And it would not be fair to Rick or Ruddy to send this man—this ragged sailor—to see if he could claim the red pup. Sig shook his head.

"We did have a bad storm early in September," he said. "Regular north-easter. I didn't see any wreck around here, though."

"Well, the schooner wasn't exactly wrecked—at least not then," went on the ragged man. "But my dog was washed overboard—a red pup he was, and I haven't had any luck since. After the storm our boat got leaking, and we had to put in. I lost my place on the *Mary Jane* and I haven't had any work since—that is not regular work. No luck at all. Maybe if I could find that dog I'd have luck again. But I don't see him around here."

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"No, we haven't any dogs," said Sig. And again he made up his mind to say nothing about Ruddy. After all it might not be the same dog. Besides, this man did not look as though he would be kind to dogs, and no one has a right to own a dog, or any other animal, unless he is kind.

"Much obliged for the soup," said the ragged sailor, as he got up from the bench. "I feel better now. Maybe I'll have some luck after this."

"I hope so," spoke Sig, as kindly as he could.

"Maybe I'll find my dog," went on the wayfarer. "Guess I'll look around this village a bit. It's right about off shore here that he was washed overboard. He might have swum to land, though I doubt it. But I'll look around. I think I'd have better luck if I could have my dog!"

He slouched off down the beach, talking to himself. Sig watched him go. The life guard had forgotten the boat he was whittling out of a block of wood.

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"It may be the dog Rick has," said Sig to himself. "But I'm not going to tell that man. He'd take Ruddy away if I did, and he hasn't any right to him. That man would be cruel to a dog, I know. I'll just slip up and tell Rick to keep Ruddy chained up for a day or two. It isn't likely this tramp will find Ruddy, but he might. I'll go tell Rick."

And that afternoon, when he had a little time to himself, the coast guard went up to the village and called on Rick.

"Where's Ruddy?" asked Sig.

There was something so strange in his voice that the boy looked up quickly and asked:

"You haven't come to take him away; have you? You don't want him back, do you, just 'cause you found him when he come out of the ocean?"

"No, I'm not going to take Ruddy away from you," answered Sig; "but another man might. Listen, Rick! I saw a tramp to-day. He once had a reddish dog, for luck, as he said, and the dog was washed overboard. Now I'll tell you what to do."

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Sig told the story of the hungry, ragged sailor who sat on the bench eating the bowl of beef stew. And Sig told how the tramp-man was going to look around to see if he could find the dog he had lost.

"Keep Ruddy chained up!" half-whispered the coast guard.

"I will!" said Rick in a low voice, and he looked over his shoulder as if, even then, the man with the scraggy beard on his face might be coming along, looking for Ruddy.

And so the setter pup, for the next three days, was kept in his kennel, or only allowed to run out at night when Rick held him on a leash. Ruddy did not like it. He whined and barked to be set free, so he might run where he pleased. But Rick, looking into the brown eyes said:

"No, Ruddy; you must stay close to the house these days. I don't want to lose you. No ragged sailor tramp is going to get you!"

Ruddy had understood there was some need to keep quiet, even as his dog ancestors had known the need of quiet when their masters were hunting in the woods. And so though the days were long and unhappy ones, Ruddy stayed close to his kennel.

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Meanwhile the ragged sailor wandered about the town, looking at the different dogs he met. Perhaps if he had found one that he could have picked up and taken away he would have done so. But all the dogs growled at the sight of him, and showed their teeth. Dogs, as a rule, do not like ragged men; though no matter how old are the clothes their master wears, it makes no difference. But that is another story.

"Yes, I lost my luck when I lost that dog," growled the tramp, as he slunk away. "But I guess he never got ashore. He was lost in the ocean, I reckon. I'll have to get another mascot dog for luck."

Then he slunk out of town, and, for a time, Ruddy was safe. But Rick did not let his dog run free until after he had talked to the life guard again.

"I guess the tramp has gone away," Sig said. "I haven't seen him around, though I did the first day after Captain White's wife gave him the bowl of stew. I guess he's gone. It will be safe to let Ruddy have a run."

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And how glad the dog was to be free once more! To dash into the water and out again, to gallop over the hills and through the woods! And Rick went with him. Every hour that he was not in school Rick spent with his dog and his boy chums. And the other boys—Chot and all of Rick's friends—loved Ruddy as though he was their own.

Ruddy never bothered the swans now. He did not even bark at them as he passed them on the shore of Silver Lake. And Ruddy and Sallie kept up their friendship. No more did Ruddy chase the cat, and no more did Sallie arch up her back and fluff out her tail if the dog came near.

One day, when the ground in the forest was thick with the fallen leaves, Ruddy went off by himself to run through the woods. He knew Rick might soon be home from school, and the dog wanted to race about by himself before that. Ruddy was livelier than the liveliest boy you ever saw. He could run twice as far and twice as fast, and sometimes Rick did not move fast enough for Ruddy, who was bubbling over with life and happiness. So it was that the dog often used to get off by himself for a joyous race through the woods, where the dried leaves made such a jolly, rattling sound.

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And it was while Ruddy was racing here and there in the woods among the leaves, catching, now and then, the most wonderful smells of wild rabbits, squirrels and quail birds—it was while thus running wildly to and fro, that Ruddy heard a voice calling.

"Mew! Mew! Meaouw!" came the sound, and Ruddy well knew what it was.

"A cat!" he thought to himself, in the way that dogs think, by instinct. "A cat! and maybe I can have fun chasing her."

Ruddy and Sallie had become friends by this time, living so close to one another, and Ruddy had given up chasing the big, gray tabby. But he was not friends with any other cat. In fact he did not then know any other cats except Sallie.

"Mew! Mew!" came the voice again, and Ruddy knew enough of animal talk to tell that it was a cat in trouble.

He sniffed and smelled his way to where the cat-odor came from until, passing around a hollow stump, he saw a sad sight.

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Huddled up in a heap among the leaves was Sallie, and the gray cat was in pain. She was caught in something, as Ruddy could see, and at once he leaped to her side, though he did not know what was the matter. All he knew was that he wanted to help a friend, as, very often, animals help one another.

The fact was that Sallie was caught in a steel trap, set to catch some wild animal of the woods.

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CHAPTER X

SALLIE IS CAUGHT

Sallie, the big, gray cat, was so huddled up among the dried leaves of the forest that, at first, Ruddy could see nothing of the trap. It was down in a hollow, and Sallie was lying close to a stump.

But Ruddy was a bird dog, and, like all his kind, he was used to nosing around among dried leaves after quail, pheasants or other game, and, seeing Sallie lying so still among the dried foliage, and not getting up to rub noses with him, as she always did since they became friends—not seeing Sallie do this, Ruddy knew something was wrong, even if Sallie had not told him. He began to nose around among the leaves to find out what was the matter.

Once, when Ruddy was a small puppy, his mother had taken him and some of the other small dogs out in the fields, and one of Ruddy's brothers had been nipped on the leg by a large ground mole, that the puppy had caught as it was trying to burrow under the earth and leaves. Ruddy remembered that his puppy brother had howled and had held his paw down among the bushes while the mole clung to it, much as Sallie hid her leg in the leaves now.

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"There must be something fast to Sallie's leg," thought Ruddy, in dog fashion. And there was. It was the trap into which Sallie had stepped—a trap hidden under the dried foliage where she had not seen it.

Ruddy nosed among the leaves, much as he would have nosed to find a game bird for which he was searching. And soon he uncovered the trap. He happened to touch it with his nose, and, as he did so, Sallie gave a soft cry. It hurt her leg to have the trap moved.

Ruddy stopped at once. Animals know when one of their kind is hurt, and, often, they do all they can to help. Ruddy wanted to help Sallie now. He wanted to help her out of the trap.

The trap was made of steel, and it had two jaws that opened, being held apart, when the trap was

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set, by a catch. There was a round, flat piece of steel, about as large as a fifty-cent piece, and on this round bit of metal, called a "pan," whoever set the trap had put some bait. Any animal that touched the pan, in trying to get the bait, would move the catch and the strong spring would snap the jaws of the trap together, holding fast anything that was between them. And it was poor Sallie's paw that was now in the jaws of the trap.

Sallie had been wandering in the woods, among the leaves, for she liked to hear them rattle and rustle, as did Ruddy. Sometimes Sallie caught grasshoppers or crickets in the woods. But this time she was caught herself—caught in the trap before she knew it.

Ruddy looked at Sallie's paw and then at Sallie and then at the trap. He was beginning to understand what had happened. Animals seem to grow wiser once they have been trapped, or see one of their kind held between the steel jaws.

Ruddy was wondering how he could help Sallie. There was only one way, so it seemed to the red-brown dog. He must have known that he could not open the trap. He might have been strong enough, but he did not know just the secret of springing apart the steel jaws. So Ruddy tried the next best thing. [Pg 126]

As tenderly as he could Ruddy took hold of Sallie by the loose skin at the back of the cat's neck. Ruddy remembered how, in the stable where he first lived, he had once seen a mother cat carry her kittens in this way, by the back of the neck. So, being careful not to bite Sallie in his teeth, which soon would be strong enough to crush bones, Ruddy tried to lift Sallie up and out of the trap.

But he soon stopped when the cat gave a howl of pain. And no wonder Sallie meowed to show that she was hurt. Her paw was pinched in the trap, and pulling her up by the back of her neck, as Ruddy was doing, made the pain worse.

Ruddy let go of Sallie as soon as he heard her cry. He knew the language of pain as well as he knew the cat's talk of friendship. Sallie, with her tongue, began to lick the paw at the part nearest the trap. Doing that seemed to ease the ache somewhat. [Pg 127]

Ruddy moved back a little, and sat down among the leaves. He looked again at Sallie, at her paw and at the trap. Plainly Ruddy was puzzled as to what next to do to help his friend.

Ruddy could see a chain on the trap. It was like the chain by which he was sometimes fastened in his kennel. The other end of the chain was fast to a log. If it had not been for this Sallie might have limped off on three legs, carrying the trap snapped shut on her other paw; for the trap was not a large one, being set only to catch rats or mice. Often wild animals drag away with them traps by which they have been caught. That is why hunters fasten the traps to heavy logs or stumps.

Ruddy knew it was of no use to try to gnaw through the steel chain or steel trap. He could gnaw wood, but not iron or steel. And after trying once more to paw around in the leaves, hoping he might free Sallie from the trap, the dog gave it up. [Pg 128]

And then came to Ruddy the right thought. He would go get the Boy—Rick, his master. Rick meant everything, now, in the dog's small world. There was nothing Rick could not do. He could easily open this trap. Ruddy would go get Rick.

As soon as this thought came to him (as it must have come; or why did he act as he did?), Ruddy gave a bark and started off. Sallie uttered a mournful meow as she saw her friend leaving. But Ruddy turned and barked at her—barked just once. But there was much meaning in that little bark. It was as if he had said:

"Don't you worry, or be afraid, Sallie. I'm not going to leave you for long. I'm going for help. I can't get that trap open myself. But Rick can! I'm going for Rick!"

And then away leaped Ruddy through the woods, scattering the dry leaves, and looking back once more, as he came to the edge of the forest, to let Sallie see he had not forgotten her.

By leaps and bounds Ruddy hurried through the clumps of trees. He leaped little brooks, and once, coming to a pond that was rather wide, he swam it, rather than lose time by going around. He was in a hurry to get his master to help Sallie. [Pg 129]

In a few minutes, so fast did he run, Ruddy was in his kennel-yard, back of the house. Rick was just coming home from school, with his sister Mazie.

"Oh, there he is!" cried Rick, as soon as he saw his dog. "I was afraid the old ragged sailor had taken you away."

Ruddy leaped about his master, who patted him on the head. Ruddy had no time now to think about ragged sailors, if, indeed, he knew what they were. He wanted to help Sallie.

Catching hold of Rick's coat, Ruddy began to pull. He gave two or three tugs and yanks, and then, letting go, ran a little way along the path toward the woods. Then he stopped, looked back at Rick and barked.

It was the first time Rick had ever seen his dog act this way, and he did not know what it meant. He looked at his pet.

"What is it, old fellow? What's the matter?" asked Rick.

"Dear me! Can't you understand? How slow you are!" said Ruddy, in dog language, which, of course, Rick could not hear. "Why when you want me to come with you all you have to do is call me once, and I come. Or you have only to whistle. Now I want you to come with me to help Sallie, and I've got to pull you along and bark and run on ahead and look back and run back—dear me! How slow you are!"

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As Rick did not at once come when Ruddy invited him the dog ran back again, once more grasped his master by the coat, and pulled a second time. He did not let go so soon, now, and actually dragged Rick along a few steps.

"Come on! Come on!" said Ruddy, as plainly as it could be said by any dog.

"Oh, he wants you to come and play with him!" exclaimed Mazie.

"No, it isn't that," her brother answered. "Ruddy would just as soon play here in the yard as anywhere else. He must want me to come to the woods. Well, I'll go, old fellow!"

No sooner did Rick start to follow Ruddy than the dog gave every sign of being pleased. He barked joyfully, leaped about, ran on ahead and then ran back to put his cold nose against Rick's hand. It was as though Ruddy was afraid Rick would not keep on following.

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But the boy did, though he could not guess what it was all about. Mazie wanted to come also, but Rick said she had better not, so he sent her home. Then he saw Chot crossing the fields, and called to his chum.

"What's the matter?" asked Chot, for he could tell by Rick's voice that something had happened.

"I don't know what it is," Rick answered, "but Ruddy pulled at my coat, and wants me to come with him!"

"Oh, I know what that means!" cried Chot. "I've often read that dogs do that when they've caught something too big for them. Maybe he's treed a bear in the woods, Rick!" Chot's eyes shone with excitement.

"There aren't any bears around here," Rick said. "But I guess Ruddy has found something in the woods he wants me to see."

"I'll come with you," offered Chot.

And, a little later, Ruddy led the two boys straight to the place where poor Sallie was held a prisoner in the trap.

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"Oh, look!" cried Chot, as he saw the gray animal fast among the leaves. "It's a big squirrel, caught in a bush!"

"No, it's Mrs. Watson's cat, Sallie!" exclaimed Rick. "She's in a trap! Poor thing!"

Sallie meauowed as she saw Ruddy coming back with the boys. The dog leaped about and barked, as if he were saying, as he really was:

"There you are, Sallie! I brought someone to help you!"

"Thank you," Sallie must have answered, but she spoke in a very weak voice, for she was in much pain.

As tenderly as they could, Rick and Chot took the trap off the cat's paw. Her leg was lame and sore, but it was not broken, I'm glad to say. She limped as she walked, and when Chot saw this he said:

"I'll carry her! Say, but your dog is smart, Rick, to come to get help for a cat in a trap!"



"It's Mrs. Watson's cat, Sallie! She's in a trap!"

"Yes, Ruddy is a smart dog," agreed Rick. "I hope the sailor tramp doesn't come and take him away!" [Pg 133]

Rick had not lost that fear which stayed with him for many days. He and Chot took turns carrying Sallie home, and very glad the cat was to rest in the arms of the kind boys. Ruddy leaped along with them, now and then giving loud barks. At least that is all they sounded like to Chot and his chum, but, really, Ruddy was talking to Sallie as he trotted along beside her.

It was more than a week before Sallie could step on her sore paw. Meanwhile she stayed in her own yard—at the house where she lived with Mrs. Watson, her mistress. Ruddy came over to see her each day, and the two became better friends than ever. Mrs. Watson thanked Rick and Ruddy for having brought home her pet cat, and as for Ruddy, Sallie's mistress saved for him every nice bone she got from the butcher's.

"I never knew a dog who was so smart," she said. "And it's remarkable how he seems to like Sallie, especially when he used to chase her so at first."

One day, when he came home from school, Rick asked his mother if he might go to the woods and see if he could get some chestnuts. [Pg 134]

"Yes," she answered, "but don't stay too long. Don't get lost as you once did, and be home before dark."

Rick promised to be careful, and to be home before supper, and then, taking a cloth salt bag, in which to carry the chestnuts if he should find any, off he started with Ruddy following. And the dog leaped about and barked happily. Nothing pleased him more than going to the woods with Rick.

Now chestnut trees were rather hard to find in the forest near where Rick lived. The blight had killed many of them, and some did not have any nuts on. So it was not until he had gone more than a mile into the woods before the small boy found a place where the ground was fairly well covered with the brown nuts.

"Now I'll get some!" cried Rick, as he began picking them up. "I'll take some home, and Mazie and I can roast them on the stove after supper."

While Rick picked up the nuts Ruddy raced here and there. He was having as much fun as was his master. At last the boy saw no more nuts on the ground, but there were many on the tree, and Rick began to look for a way to climb up and shake them down. The chestnut trunk was too big for him to span with his arms, so he started up a slim maple that grew next to it. Rick was a good tree climber, but to-day he was out of luck. He managed to scramble up a few feet and then he suddenly slipped in a queer way. One leg was caught fast between the trunk of the maple and a slim branch, and the next Rick knew, he was lying on his back on the ground, under the tree, with one leg stuck almost upright, and held fast. Rick was caught, almost as if he were in a trap. [Pg 136]

CHAPTER XI

A MYSTERIOUS WHISTLE

Rick was at first so shaken and stunned by the fall that he could not speak. The breath seemed to have been jarred out of him, as it was once when he fell down stairs, and he could not even cry for nearly a quarter of a minute. But at last his breath came back to him, and he exclaimed:

"Oh! Oh, dear!"

Instantly Ruddy was at his master's side. The dog had been nosing around among the leaves. He had caught the scent of a wild rabbit, and he was jumping about for joy, getting ready to follow the trail of the little creature to its burrow. And let me tell you that Ruddy could, by merely smelling on the ground, over which the rabbit had walked, tell which path the rabbit had gone, whether away from its underground home or toward it.

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And Ruddy would not follow the trail away from the rabbit's home. He would nose his way along, getting nearer and nearer to the bunny's burrow at each step until, at last, he might catch the furry little fellow.

It was not that Ruddy was cruel, or liked to hurt rabbits. It was just his nature to want to hunt them. And so it was as he nosed around among the leaves, the wild smell of the rabbit coming more and more strongly to him, that Ruddy heard his master's cry of pain.

Instantly the wild rabbit was forgotten, and Ruddy bounded to the side of Rick—poor Rick who was lying on the ground, one foot caught in the crotch of a tree from which he had fallen as he tried to climb up and get the chestnuts.

"Oh! Oh, dear!" exclaimed Rick again, for he was in pain, his ankle being turned on one side. He hoped it wasn't broken.

"Bow, wow!" barked Ruddy. That was all Rick heard his dog say, and he almost knew it meant: "Dear me! I'm sorry about this!"

But Ruddy said a good deal more than this, or, at least, he thought it, in the strange, mysterious way dogs have of thinking.

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"Well, well!" thought Ruddy to himself, dog fashion. "You surely are in trouble, Master! In almost as much trouble as Sallie was! I wonder if I can help you?"

Ruddy sniffed at Rick, walked around him and sniffed again. Ruddy did not exactly understand what had happened. But he knew his master was held fast as the cat had been, though in a different way.

"You can't get me out, Ruddy! You can't get me loose, old boy!" spoke Rick. "You'd better go home and bring somebody to help, as you brought me to help the cat! Go home, Ruddy! Go home!"

Ruddy heard these words and he knew what they meant. Once or twice before Rick had sent his dog home when Ruddy had followed at a time when he ought not to have done so. Then Rick had spoken sharply, as one must do, at times, with a dog, to make sure he obeys. But now Rick's voice was quite different. He was begging Ruddy to do him a favor.

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"Go home, Ruddy! Go home!" ordered Rick.

Ruddy barked once or twice, circled around Rick who lay on his back with one foot stuck up in the air, where it was held fast in the tree, and then the dog came and licked Rick's face with his smooth tongue. Dog's tongues are smooth, you know, and cat's tongues are rough.

"Oh, I know you like me, Ruddy!" said Rick, with a half laugh in spite of his pain. "You needn't kiss me any more to show that! But run home and bring somebody to help me get loose."

And then Ruddy knew just what was wanted of him, and off through the woods he rushed. He scattered the dried leaves from side to side, he leaped little brooks, swam larger ones and never stopped, no matter how often he caught the scent of the wild rabbits and squirrels. And then, panting from his run, Ruddy leaped into the house just as Mr. Dalton reached home. Ruddy lost no time. He took hold of Rick's father's coat, just as he had taken hold of Rick's, the day Sallie was caught in a trap, and then the dog tried to pull the man along with him.

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And because of what had happened before—because Mr. Dalton knew Ruddy would not do this unless he had a reason for it—he followed the dog at once, running out of the house after him.

"What is it? Oh, what's the matter?" cried the boy's mother.

"I don't know," answered her husband, "except that Rick is in some kind of trouble, and Ruddy has come to have me help. I'll go get Rick and bring him home!"

"Oh, but—but suppose he is badly hurt!" cried Mrs. Dalton.

"I don't believe he is," answered the father. "He may have fallen from a tree, and, at worst, have broken a leg. I'll get him!"

He followed Ruddy, and, once the dog had made sure his master's father was coming along, he

lost no time, but ran through the woods, straight to the place where he had left Rick.

"Rick! Rick! Where are you?" cried Mr. Dalton, as he entered the forest.

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"Here I am, Dad! Caught fast in a tree!" cried the boy.

"Are you badly hurt?"

"No, only my leg is caught. Did Ruddy come after you?"

"Indeed he did! Good old Ruddy!"

The dog barked as he heard his name spoken, ran to Rick, who still was held fast, and again licked his face.

"Steady now, boy!" said Mr. Dalton, and, in a few moments he had raised Rick's foot, something which the boy could not do for himself, and had freed him from the tree-trap. That is really what it was, a tree-trap, though no one had set it. The trap just grew there.

To Rick's joy he found that his ankle was not broken, and not even sprained. It had been twisted rather roughly, and it gave him pain when he stepped on it, but he could walk slowly, and did not need to be carried.

"How did it happen?" asked Rick's father, and the boy told him, meanwhile picking up the chestnuts that had fallen from his pockets as he toppled from the tree.

"It's a good thing I had Ruddy with me," said Rick, "or maybe I'd have been here a long while."

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"Yes," agreed Mr. Dalton. "But if you hadn't come home by dark I would have come after you, and if I had had Ruddy with me I think he soon would have picked up your trail, and he would have led me to you; wouldn't you, Ruddy old boy?"

The dog barked in delight as he heard this talk, for he knew he was being praised, and a dog, or nearly any other animal, likes kindness as much as we ourselves do. And let me tell you this, your dog can tell, just by the sound of your voice, whether you are speaking kindly or are cross with him. Just try it. In harsh, angry tones say to him:

"You are a bad dog!"

See how his tail will drop between his legs, and how he will slink away—that is if he is a natural dog and has not been spoiled. Then say those same words in the kindest, most gentle voice you can, and see how your dog will brighten up, and wag his tail.

So you see it isn't the *words* so much as it is *how you say* them, though I do believe that some dogs know certain words, no matter how they are spoken.

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Anyhow Ruddy understood that his master and the father were pleased with him, and he capered about, barking and trying to reach up to lick Rick's face again.

"We must hurry back home," said Mr. Dalton. "Your mother will be worried about you, Rick!"

And Mrs. Dalton was so worried that, half way home, father and son met her coming along to see what had happened to her boy.

And when she saw that Rick was all right, and when she heard what had happened, you may be sure she loved that red dog almost as much as her boy did; and that was a great deal! There was no question now about not keeping Ruddy.

Rick was a little lame for two or three days after his chestnut hunt, and he had to tell the story to his chums over and over again, of how Ruddy had gone back home and brought help to him.

"He sure is a fine dog!" exclaimed Chot, and all the other boys agreed with him.

When Rick came home from school each day he used to stop, when about a block away from his home, and give a shrill whistle. This was to call Ruddy to him, and the dog, who always seemed to be waiting, would rush down the street to meet his master. If he had been chained in his kennel during the day Mrs. Dalton would loosen him shortly before it was time for Rick to come along. Sometimes she forgot, and then Ruddy would tug at his chain to get loose as soon as he heard the boy's whistle.

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But one day, about a week after Rick's accident at the chestnut tree, while Mrs. Dalton was in the kitchen baking a cake, she suddenly heard a shrill whistle. It seemed to come from down the street, which was from where Rick always called his dog. And as soon as Mrs. Dalton had heard the shrill notes, perhaps even before, Ruddy, asleep in his kennel, has also caught them. He sprang up with a joyful bark, rattling his chain.

"Why, it isn't time for Rick to be home from school yet!" said his mother in surprise; "unless he is out earlier than usual. Maybe something has happened and there isn't any more school just now—the teacher may have given the boys a holiday."

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"Yes, Ruddy! I'm going to let you loose so you may go meet him!" spoke Mrs. Dalton, as she hurried out to loosen the chain.

Again the shrill whistle sounded, and Ruddy barked with impatience. He could hardly wait to run

and meet Rick. Later on I am going to tell you how Ruddy learned to know when his master was coming without hearing this call, even when Rick was far off.

Out of the yard bounded the dog, and Mrs. Dalton went back to her baking, wondering why her son was returning from school so early. But, a little later, when Ruddy came back alone, she was more surprised.

"What!" she exclaimed. "No Rick? That's queer! I thought I surely heard his whistle, and you did, too, Ruddy. But it must have been some other boy."

Ruddy looked puzzled and disappointed. It was the first time he had gone to meet his master and had not found him. The red dog could not understand it.

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"It must have been some other boy," said Mrs. Dalton. "But never mind, Ruddy. It will soon be time for Rick to come."

Ruddy went back to his kennel, and Mrs. Dalton kept on with her baking. A little later it was twelve o'clock, and in came Rick. He had forgotten to whistle because he was so excited over a game of football he, Chot and some other boys were going to play that afternoon.

"Hello, Ruddy!" cried Rick, as he saw his dog. "Hello, old boy!" and the setter leaped joyfully about his master.

"What other boy whistles like you?" asked Rick's mother, as she told what had happened, and how Ruddy had been disappointed.

"No other boy that I know of," answered Rick. "I always have a special whistle for Ruddy, and he knows it."

"Someone whistled exactly like you," went on Mrs. Dalton. "I was fooled by it, and so was Ruddy. I wonder——"

"Hark!" exclaimed Rick.

Again a shrill whistle sounded. It seemed to come from the street outside. Ruddy sprang up with a bark, his soft, silky ears cocked up as much as he could raise them.

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"There it is—hear it!" said Mrs. Dalton.

Again came the signal call, and Ruddy looked toward the gate and then at his master. Clearly it was not Rick whistling, and yet——

"Someone is trying to call Ruddy away!" said Rick in a low voice. "They're trying to fool him. Maybe it's that tramp sailor—the one who was telling Sig about the dog that was washed overboard. Oh, Ruddy! If they take you away from me!"

Once more came the shrill whistle. It seemed to be calling the dog, and Ruddy did not know what to do.

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CHAPTER XII

RUDDY IS GONE

Rick dropped his strap of school books that had been swinging around his head as he ran home.

"Come on, Ruddy!" the boy called to his dog. "We'll see who is doing that whistling!"

And by the sharp, short bark the setter gave his master knew that the dog was as ready as he, himself, to find out who was trying to play a trick on them, if anyone was.

"Wait a minute, Rick!" called his mother, as the two friends ran toward the gate. "What was that you said about a tramp sailor?"

Rick repeated what the coast guard had told him.

"Then you'd better be careful how you let Ruddy run loose," went on Mrs. Dalton. "Do you think the sailor is hiding out there now, trying to call Ruddy?"

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"That's what I think, Mother," the boy answered. "But if anyone who doesn't really own Ruddy tries to take him away from me——" Rick paused when he had said this much. He really didn't know what he would do. "But I guess Ruddy won't go with them; will you, old fellow?" he asked his dog.

And from the manner in which Ruddy barked and capered about the boy he had grown to care for so much, it did seem that no one else could ever get the dog away.

Once again the whistle sounded, just as if it were Rick himself, or an echo of the boy's shrill call. Ruddy was puzzled by it and, lifting up his ears, looked up into Rick's face, as if to ask what it all meant.

"Come on! We'll find it out!" called the boy.

Together they ran to the street. Rick looked up and down. No one was in sight. And then, again came the shrill call. It sounded overhead.

"Someone is up in a tree!" cried Rick. "Is that you, Chot?" he called, thinking perhaps his chum was trying to play a little joke on him. [Pg 150]

There was no answer, but, after a moment the whistle sounded again, and then followed a loud, harsh call of:

"Haw! Haw! Haw!"

If you could have seen the looks, then, on the faces of Rick and Ruddy you would have laughed. Both boy and dog showed how very much they had been fooled by the whistling of the pet crow.

For it was Rick's black bird, Haw-Haw by name, who had been doing the whistling. The sly fellow had listened to Rick until he could imitate the boy perfectly and now, up in a tree into which he had managed to flutter, Haw-Haw was calling Ruddy.

"Come down out of that, Haw-Haw! Come down!" called Rick, and there was a fluttering amid the branches of the tree on which there were still a few leaves. Haw-Haw, whose broken wing had healed, not enough to permit him to fly well, but enough so that he could flutter up into the low branches of trees, came half tumbling down, half soaring and perched himself on Rick's shoulder. [Pg 151]

"I didn't know you could whistle!" exclaimed the boy. "I was going to teach you, Haw-Haw, but I guess you must have taught yourself. Whistle again for me!"

But Haw-Haw did not seem to want to do this. He preened his glossy black feathers with his black bill, and made funny little noises down in his throat.

Ruddy, his head on one side, peered up at the crow on Rick's shoulder and the queer, puzzled look was still on the dog's face.

"It's all right, Ruddy! It's all right," said Rick, patting his setter's head. "It was only Haw-Haw whistling for you."

Rick had been so busy having fun and going to school that, after his father had set the crow's broken wing, the boy had almost forgotten about his black bird. But Haw-Haw had grown stronger and he had grown tame—so tame that he would perch on the shoulders of any members of the family and let them feed him. Rick had been talking of teaching the crow to talk and whistle, as he had read could be done. But he kept putting it off, for one reason and another, until he was much surprised by hearing the crow's whistle. [Pg 152]

"Did you find who it was trying to call Ruddy?" asked Rick's mother, as he came back in the yard with the crow on his shoulder and the dog leaping around him, barking joyously and excitedly. Ruddy did not altogether like Haw-Haw being so friendly with Rick.

"It was my crow whistling!" said Rick.

"Your crow?" exclaimed Mrs. Dalton, in surprise.

"Yes. He must have been listening to me at different times, until he got so he could whistle just as I do when I call Ruddy. And Haw-Haw certainly sounded natural. He fooled even you; didn't he, Ruddy?"

The dog barked as much as to say:

"He certainly did!"

Just how Haw-Haw learned to whistle Rick never found out. Certainly the boy did not cut the crow's tongue, and perhaps whistling came natural to the black bird. And it may be that it was not a regular "whistle" at all, but merely a sound like that. Of course a bird has no lips to pucker up and whistle with, as boys have, and some girls, too. But many birds utter whistling notes when they sing, or give their calls. The quail, or Bob White, seems to whistle, and so does the Whip-poor-will. And I have heard many men who can, by whistling with their tongue and lips, imitate many birds. I have even heard a man whistle like a robin, and so nearly perfectly as to deceive a cat. Pussy came running into the room where the man was whistling, looking around to find the feathered songster. [Pg 153]

So it is easily possible for a crow to imitate the whistle of a boy, and this is what Haw-Haw had done. He must have practised by himself in the woodshed, whistling in low notes at first, as a singer does who is not quite sure of the air. And then, when he found he could imitate Rick's cheerful call to his dog, the crow had fluttered out into a tree, and had sent his shrill notes echoing.

"Well, now I know you can whistle I'm going to teach you to talk, Haw-Haw," said Rick.

The boy began that very afternoon on the crow's further education. Rick got from the kitchen some pieces of meat, which the black bird liked very much, and, holding one chunk up near the sharp, strong bill, said: [Pg 154]

"Now, Haw-Haw, let me hear you say something! Say 'I want a piece of meat!'"

But whether this was too long a sentence for the crow to start on, or whether he did not

understand what Rick wanted I can not say. At any rate Haw-Haw said nothing. He did not even whistle. He just held his head on one side, as Ruddy sometimes did when Rick was talking to him, and Haw-Haw looked at the chunk of meat held in Rick's fingers so temptingly near.

"Go on! Say something!" exclaimed Rick.

Suddenly Ruddy, who was sitting up just behind his master, gave a bark. Ruddy's eyes, too, were on the meat, and perhaps he thought his boy master was talking to him. At any rate Ruddy barked, Rick turned his head aside for a moment to speak to his setter pet.

And at that instant Haw-Haw, seeing his chance, took it. Rick felt a sudden jab at his fingers, the meat was snatched from them and then with a loud "Haw! Haw!" the crow fluttered up to the roof of the woodshed to eat the morsel. [Pg 155]

"Oh, that isn't fair!" cried Rick, but he had to laugh. "That isn't playing the game!"

"Haw! Haw!" croaked the crow, and it sounded just as if he were laughing at Rick. He may have been, too, for all I know.

That was the beginning of the crow's education at the hands of Rick, but not many times after that could the black bird fool his master by snatching away the meat or other dainty. Rick was more careful.

Rick did manage to get Haw-Haw to say a few words. At least the boy declared they were words, though his father and mother said they could not understand them. Mazie said she could, so perhaps it was because Mr. and Mrs. Dalton did not stop long enough to listen.

And Haw-Haw also tried some other whistling notes, different from the dog-call he had learned of Rick. But that dog-call was the best thing he did, and he often fooled Ruddy by fluttering out to a bush in front of the house and giving the shrill whistle by which Rick used to summon his pet on coming from school. [Pg 156]

After a while, when Haw-Haw knew he could play his tricks on Ruddy, the crow did it so often that the poor dog was quite puzzled about it. Ruddy would be sleeping on the porch, perhaps, waiting for Rick to come from school to have a romp across the fields. And then, about time for the classes to be dismissed, the crow would softly flutter out from his nest in the woodshed and take his perch in a bush, or on a low branch of a tree. There he would give his whistle.

With a bark of welcome Ruddy would awaken from his sleep and dash off the porch out to the front gate. There he would glance up and down the street, where no Rick was in sight.

With a queer look on his face, the dog would then go back to the porch, growling and glancing up at the tree where the crow was perched. Ruddy knew he had been fooled. But, no matter how often this happened, he would always jump up and run out whenever Haw-Haw whistled. Ruddy could not tell the difference between the notes of the crow and the call of Rick. As I told you a dog depends on his scent, or by smelling with his nose, to tell his master and friends, and not on his ears or eyesight, though a dog's hearing is better than his vision. [Pg 157]

"I guess I'll have to stop whistling for Ruddy when I come home from school," said Rick to his mother one day, when he had come in with his books, and had been told that Haw-Haw had played the trick three times on the setter that afternoon. "It's too bad to plague him that way. I won't whistle any more when I come along."

"I guess it would be just as well not to," agreed Mrs. Dalton. "Haw-Haw is too smart for Ruddy. And he has another trick, too, Rick."

"You mean Haw-Haw has?"

"Yes, he took some spoons off the kitchen table to-day and dropped them in the hollow of a tree in front of the house. I saw him, or I wouldn't have known about it. It's quite a deep hollow and I could hardly reach down in and get the spoons. And what else do you think I found down in there?" [Pg 158]

"I don't know. Was it my roller skate key that I lost?"

"No, but it was the new tea strainer I lost. That disappeared last week. Haw-Haw must have carried it off. I have heard that crows like to pick up shiny things and hide them, but this is the first time our crow had done such a trick."

"Say, he's a regular trick crow; isn't he?" exclaimed Rick.

"Too much so!" laughed Mrs. Dalton. "I must watch him."

"And I must try to teach him some more words to say," went on Rick. "He can almost say 'I want my supper' now."

"Well, I'm glad you think it sounds like something," said Rick's mother. "To me your crow's talk only resembles a lot of screeching and jabbering."

"Oh, he'll learn to talk all right," declared Rick. "I'm going to teach him now."

And when Chot came over, a little later, the two boys took turns at educating the black crow. They seemed to be satisfied with what Haw-Haw learned, though when the crow was brought in

the house, perched on Rick's shoulder, and asked to repeat his latest lesson, he only flapped his one good wing and whistled shrilly.

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"Oh, say! You're a tease!" cried Rick, and Mazie laughed at the two boys.

But Rick gave up whistling to Ruddy on coming home from school, and the crow soon learned that he could no longer fool the dog. Ruddy was growing wiser and Haw-Haw gradually stopped that trick, though he did not forget how to whistle.

However, though Rick gave up sounding his signal call to his dog on coming from school, Ruddy seemed to know about the time to expect his boy master. He would be on the watch and waiting, and, when the hands of the clock pointed to a little after three, Rick would race out to the gate and wait for his chum; for that is what Rick and Ruddy were now—chums.

One afternoon Rick came running in the gate, swinging his books like the pendulum of a clock that was running on double time.

"Where's Ruddy? Where's my football?" cried the boy. "We're going to have some fun—all the boys over in the big field! Where's Ruddy? Where's my football?"

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"Why, your football must be just where you left it," Mrs. Dalton answered. "As for Ruddy, didn't he come to meet you?"

"Come to meet me? No. Was he here a while ago?"

"Just a little while ago, yes. He was asleep on the porch. I heard a whistle, and saw him rush out."

"But, Mother, I didn't whistle for him! I don't call him that way any more since Haw-Haw played that trick. I didn't call Ruddy!"

"You didn't?"

"No!" was the answer. Rick was beginning to be alarmed.

"Someone whistled and he ran out," went on Mrs. Dalton.

"I wonder if it was Haw-Haw?" spoke the boy.

Just then the crow fluttered out from the kitchen, where he sometimes went to sleep behind the stove.

"It couldn't have been him," declared Rick.

"It was someone," said Mrs. Dalton. "I saw Ruddy run out as he always does when he goes to meet you, and——"

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Rick did not stop to hear what else his mother had to say. He rushed for the front gate and looked up and down the street. No Ruddy was in sight, and a great fear came into the boy's heart.

Ruddy was gone.

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CHAPTER XIII ON THE SEARCH

Never, since the red-brown setter had come up out of the ocean to be Rick's dog, had Ruddy not been on hand to greet his master when the boy came racing from school. During the hours when Rick had to be at his classes, studying or reciting his lessons, Ruddy, when not chained in his kennel, would roam about the woods and fields, not too far away from the house. Once he had even followed Rick and Mazie to school, and Rick had been excused, and allowed to bring his pet back home.

And now, for the first time, Ruddy was not there to greet his master. Rick looked up and down the street but no dog was in sight; only Sallie, the cat.

Rick gave a shrill whistle, the kind he always used to call his pet, but there was no joyous, answering bark. Sallie, the cat, gave a meow as if replying, but Rick did not understand cat language, or at least not very much of it, so he did not know what Sallie was saying. Perhaps the cat was telling Rick she knew where Ruddy had gone, but, being unable to speak boy-talk, the cat was of no use to Rick.

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"Here, Ruddy! Ruddy! Here, Ruddy, boy!" called Rick. Then he whistled again, and Haw-Haw, being fully awake now, and hearing the shrill notes, imitated them.

"Oh, Mother!" exclaimed Rick, coming back to the side porch. "Where do you s'pose Ruddy can be?"

"Oh, I guess he just ran off, maybe to play with Peter," said Mrs. Dalton.

"But he never did it before—not when I was coming home from school," remarked the boy.

Just then Haw-Haw whistled again.

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Dalton. "I heard a whistle just like that a few minutes before you came. It wasn't the crow, for he was asleep behind the stove."

"And I didn't whistle!" declared Rick. "Oh, do you think it could be that sailor—the one who was asking Mr. Bailey about Ruddy? Maybe he's been around here, and he heard me whistle, or maybe he heard Haw-Haw, and he knows how we used to call Ruddy. And maybe he called my dog and took him away." [Pg 164]

"Oh, I hardly think so," said Mrs. Dalton, though she was afraid this might have happened. "I guess Ruddy just ran off to play with Peter, or some other dog."

"But he never did it before!" exclaimed Rick. "He always knows when I'm coming from school and he waits for me."

This was true enough, and Mrs. Dalton knew it. Just then Mazie, who had stopped on her way home from school to talk to some of her girl friends, came into the yard.

"Did you see Ruddy?" asked Rick, eagerly.

"No," was the answer. "Oh, is he lost, Rick?"

"I—I'm afraid so," was the reply. "I'm going to go out and look for him."

"Better look over in Peter's yard," suggested Mrs. Dalton. "Ruddy may be there."

But the red-brown setter dog was not playing with the queer sleepy-eyed, though good-natured English bull. Peter was gnawing a bone near his kennel when Rick hurried in. [Pg 165]

"Bow wow!" barked Peter, for that was his way of saying "Hello!"

"Here, Ruddy! Ruddy!" called Rick, looking around the yard of Tom Martin's house, for Rick thought his dog might have been playing with Peter a game very much like the boys' game of hide-and-go-seek.

"Ruddy isn't here," said Tom, coming out of the house with a slice of bread and jam. "What's the matter, can't you find him?"

Rick told about Ruddy's disappearance.

"Come on! We'll go and look for him!" offered Tom, making hasty bites at the bread and jam, after breaking off a piece for his boy friend, and giving Peter a nibble. "We'll take Peter and look for Ruddy."

"Thanks!" exclaimed Rick, hungrily chewing away. "I guess that'll be best. I'll go tell my mother we're going."

"And maybe when you get back home Ruddy will be there," suggested Tom.

"No, I don't believe he will," spoke Rick, rather sadly. "I don't know where Ruddy is, but he's gone." [Pg 166]

And gone the setter certainly was—at least he was not back at Rick's house when Tom and Rick reached there, with Peter running along beside them, sniffing at every tree and fence post.

"Hello, Rick! What you doin'?" called Chot from the back yard of his home, where he was beating a rug.

"Looking for my dog," answered Rick. "Ruddy's gone!"

"Whew!" whistled Chot. "That's too bad. Wait a minute, I'll come and help you look!"

Searching for a lost dog was more fun, any day, than knocking the dust out of a rug. Chot must have said as much to his mother, or else have promised to finish the beating later, for he soon came running out to join Tom and Rick.

"Where'd he go?" asked Chot, after he had patted Peter on the head, and the dog had wagged his tail.

"We don't know," Rick answered, and then he told about Ruddy having run out at the sound of a whistle. [Pg 167]

"It must have been your crow, playing a trick again," Chot said.

"No," declared Rick. "It was that sailor tramp, this time, I'm sure. He wants to get Ruddy back—he told the coast guard so. Ruddy's a lucky dog, and the sailor tramp wanted him."

"He's a good dog all right," agreed Tom. "But it isn't very lucky for him to run away and get lost!"

"Tisn't his fault!" declared Rick. "That sailor whistled him away. He must have whistled like I do, and Ruddy knew it wasn't Haw-Haw, 'cause the crow was asleep behind the stove. Ruddy ran out when he heard the whistle, and the sailor has him."

"Well, we'll get him back!" cried Chot, fiercely.

Making sure, by calling and whistling, that Ruddy had not come back to the house while he was down street with his boy friends, Rick and his chums started off on the search.

"Can't I come?" asked Mazie, for she loved Ruddy as much as did her brother.

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"Oh, no, dear! You can't go off with the boys," said Mrs. Dalton. "They're going across the field, and maybe to the woods. You must be back before dark!" she called to Rick.

"Yes'm, I will—if I find Ruddy!" he answered.

"The first thing we'd better do," suggested Tom, "is to go along the street and ask people we meet. Peter used to run away a lot, and I always got him back that way. He's such a funny-looking dog that everybody remembers him after they have seen him."

"But Ruddy isn't a funny-looking dog," objected Rick.

"No, Ruddy is nice," agreed Tom. "But he isn't like any other dog around here, and if anybody saw an old sailor taking him away they'd remember."

"Yes, I guess they would," admitted Chot. "We'd better ask folks, Rick."

This was decided on, and the three boys began their search, first going up and down the street on which Rick lived. But no one had seen Ruddy running around that afternoon, or at least if they had seen him, they did not remember.

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The blacksmith, the cigar-store keeper and the grocery man—each one of whom knew Ruddy—said they had not noticed him. It was not until the boys went in a small candy store, at the foot of the street, that they first obtained any information.

"I didn't exactly see your dog, Rick," said Mrs. Blake, who kept the store. She had come out to wait on the boys, for Rick had three cents and he was treating his chums. "I didn't see your dog Ruddy, but, now that you speak of it, I did see something queer about an hour ago.

"A rag peddler came to ask if I had any papers, old automobile tires or anything like that to sell. As if I'd have an auto!" and Mrs. Blake laughed, for she was rather poor. "However, what I was going to say," she went on, "was that when I looked out toward the rag man's wagon, I saw he had another person with him. There was a big man on the seat, and when I told the junkman I had nothing for him I saw something like a dog, or some animal, down in among the bundles of papers in the wagon. And the man on the seat was trying to keep this dog, or whatever it was, from jumping out."

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"Oh, that was Ruddy all right! I'm sure it was!" cried Rick. "That sailor man must have whistled him away and have put him on the junk wagon. He couldn't get Ruddy any other way. The old sailor has my dog!"

"I guess he has!" agreed Tom.

"Which way did the wagon go? Come on, let's chase after it!" cried Chot.

"It was headed down the street when I saw it," answered Mrs. Blake. "But I didn't pay much attention to it. I never thought it might be your dog, Rick."

"I'm sure it was," said the boy. "Oh, I wonder if I can get him back?"

"Sure we can!" cried Tom Martin. "We'll chase after that junk man until we catch him, and then we'll make the sailor give up the dog!"

"Come on!" shouted Chot. "We'll have a regular 'cop and robbers' chase! Come on!"

Rushing out, leaving open the door of the candy shop, the boys hurried down the street, their eyes eager for a sight of a junk wagon in which rode two men and a dog.

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"Poor boy!" sighed Mrs. Blake, as she closed the door. "I hope Rick gets back his pet."

Tracing a junk wagon in Belemere was easier than trying to find out from passers by which way a dog had gone. And the boys soon learned that the wagon had turned off on a road that led to the next town.

"Come on!" cried Chot. "I know a short cut we can take across the lots, and get ahead of the junk man. Come on!"

He led Rick and Tom down a lane, past the small electric light station, and out into the field. The boys had not gone very far before Rick cried:

"Say this is a regular swamp! There's a lot of water here!"

"'Tisn't deep!" said Chot. "It won't no more than go over the tops of your shoes! Come on!"

He was in the lead, but the others were close behind him. Suddenly Rick gave a cry.

"What's the matter?" asked Chot, turning toward his chum. "Do you see the junk wagon?"

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"No, but I'm sinking down! I'm sinking, Chot! It's way up over the tops of my shoes now! I'm stuck in the mud! I can't pull my feet out!" yelled Rick.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE OLD CABIN

Chot and Tom, who had run on a little ahead of Rick, stopped and looked back at their chum as they heard his cries. Rick had also come to a stop, more because he had to, than because he wanted to.

"Come on back and help me!" he called to his friends.

And the boy's appeal for aid was answered at once by the two chums.

"Say, he is 'way down in the muck!" exclaimed Ted. "Isn't he?"

"He must have walked in the wrong place," added Chot.

However it had happened poor Rick was indeed, as he said, stuck in the mud. His two chums saw this as they ran back to him.

"You got off the path, that's what's the matter!" declared Chot, as he looked at Rick—standing at a safe distance, of course, so that he, too, would not get caught in the swamp. [Pg 174]

"You ought to have followed us," went on Ted. "We kept to the path. You got to stay up on one side when you cross this field. There's a sort of brook running through the middle of it, and you can't see it 'till you get right in it."

"Well, I didn't see it, and I'm in it all right," announced Rick. "I can't hardly lift my feet. Look!"

He rested his weight on one side, and tried to lift the opposite foot. There was a sucking sound made, as his shoe came partly up out of the mud, but it was hard work for the boy to pull himself loose.

"Look out!" suddenly called Tom, as he saw Rick tottering as if about to fall to one side. "Look out or you'll go all the way in!"

"That's what I think," agreed Rick himself. "Say, get hold of me and pull me out; will you?"

Tom was going closer, intending to take hold of Rick's outstretched hands, but Chot called sharply: [Pg 175]

"Don't do that! If you do you'll be stuck, too!"

"But we got to do something!" insisted Tom. "We can't leave him stuck here!"

"Of course not!" assented Chot. "We'll get you out all right, Rick, and we'll help you find your dog, too. Come on over here, Tom, and help me get a fence rail. We can hold that out to Rick and pull him loose that way!"

Tom and Chot were about a year older than Rick, and knew a little better what to do in a case of this kind than did Ruddy's master.

"Don't be scared," Chot called to his chum, as the two boys walked off up a little hill toward a fence. "We'll get you out all right. I've been stuck in the mud here myself. You can wash your shoes off down in the brook. It isn't very cold to-day."

"My shoes'll be terrible muddy," declared Rick, trying to get a look at them, but he could not—they were too deep down in the muck.

It did not take Tom and Chot long to find a long fence rail that was not too heavy for them to lift. They carried it back to Rick and held out one end to him, retaining hold of the other end themselves. [Pg 176]

"Now keep a tight grip, and when we pull, you pull and lift your feet and then you'll be loose," advised Chot.

Rick did his share, the other boys pulled and pretty soon, with another queer, sucking, sighing sound Rick felt his feet coming free from the mud and he could lift them out one after the other. He was glad to see his feet again, muddy as they were, for he was beginning to fear they might sink so far down in the swamp of the field that he would never get them back.

"They're terrible muddy!" spoke Rick as he got on firm ground and looked at his shoes. "Terrible!"

"Yes, but it'll wash off," consoled Chot. "Come on down to the brook, and mind you keep on the path, now! You must have got off or you wouldn't have been stuck."

"I didn't know you had to stay on the path," Rick said.

"Sure you do," declared Chot. "There's a lot of water, a regular bog, under this field. If you get off the path you'll be stuck. Now after you wash your shoes you follow Tom and me." [Pg 177]

There was, as Chot had said, a sort of path through the field which a half-hidden brook had turned into a swamp. The path led along on top of numbers of big grass hummocks, or "footstools," as Rick called them. By jumping from one grass hummock to the other the boys could keep out of the mud.

Chot went on ahead, while Rick came next, and Tom brought up the rear guard for Rick. He safely reached the brook, and there he washed the worst of the mud off his shoes. He was thinking what his mother would say when she saw them.

"That's good enough!" declared Chot, after Rick had dabbled each foot in the brook several times. "That's good enough. The rest of the mud'll dry off when we run through the grass. Come on!"

"Yes, we don't want to stop here too long," agreed Rick. "I want to find Ruddy."

"We'll be out on the road soon," said Chot. "If that peddler and the sailor drove out of Belemere they'd have to come over on this road we're coming to. And unless they drove terrible fast we ought to be ahead of 'em."

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"Junk wagons don't drive fast," declared Tom. "They stop at every house to buy papers and bottles."

"That's the reason I think we'll get ahead of these fellows," said Chot. "Come on, Rick."

The boy's shoes were fairly clean now, and, as his chums had remarked, they would dry and be cleaned more as he ran through the grass. Once again the chase was taken up. By keeping to the path, and by leaping from hummock to hummock, Rick managed to avoid sinking down in any more bog holes. Soon the three chums came out on the solid road.

Rick looked up and down, hoping to get a sight of the junk wagon in which, he felt sure, was his dog Ruddy, enticed away by the old sailor—the tramp sailor.

Chot began looking down in the dust of the highway, walking back and forth his eyes close to the ground.

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"What you doing?" demanded Rick, as he watched his friend. "Did you lose something?"

"I'm looking for wagon tracks," answered Chot.

"Wagon tracks?" cried Rick and Tom together.

"Yes," went on Chot, "but I can't make out whether the junk wagon has been along here or not. There's too many other tracks, and marks of auto tires, besides."

"Do you really think you can tell if the junk wagon has been along here?" asked Rick.

"Well, I thought maybe I could," answered Chot. "You see I belong to the Boy Scouts," he went on, "and we're learning how to tell marks on the ground. Course animal marks, like the paws of a dog, are easier to tell than wagon tracks. But if there was smooth ground here, instead of a lot of dust that other wagons and autos had run over, maybe I could tell if the junk wagon had been along. I could for sure if I knew what kind of marks the tires made."

"But as long as you don't know you can't tell very much," spoke Tom. "But I know that Boy Scout business is good. I'm going to join a troop, I guess."

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"But which way shall we go to catch up to that junk wagon and get Ruddy back?" asked Rick. He, too, was interested in Boy Scouts, but not at a time like this. He wanted his dog.

"This is the way the junk man would go after coming from Belemere," announced Chot, pointing down the road. "If he went that way," and he pointed in the opposite direction, "he'd be going back where he came from."

"Then let's chase along!" cried Rick. "I want my dog!"

"That's it!" exclaimed Tom. "We got to catch that junk man!"

"And the sailor," added Rick, "he's the one that's got my dog, I'm sure. The junk man is only giving him a ride so he can get away quicker."

"And is this the sailor that had your dog before he come up out of the ocean and the coast guard found him?" asked Chot.

"I guess so," was Rick's answer as the three boys walked along. "But, anyhow, even if that sailor did have the dog, maybe he hasn't any right to him now. Ruddy came to me. Maybe he ran away from the sailor. And if a dog runs away from a man he doesn't belong to him any more."

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I do not say Rick was right in this belief, but his chums thought that he was, for they exclaimed:

"Sure! That's it! He's your dog!"

Along the road they hurried, for it was getting late and Rick's mother had told him to come back home before dark. The highway turned around a clump of trees, where the brook ran close to the road. After that there was a straight stretch for some distance. Reaching this, and looking down it, Rick and his chums saw no junk wagon, and no sight of any dog.

"Maybe he didn't come here at all!" murmured Rick, who was much disappointed.

"We'll ask at the next house," suggested Chot. "If the junk wagon came along here the man would ask to buy old rags or bottles. We'll ask, at the next house, if anybody saw him."

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And there they received news which showed them that they were on the right track.

"Yep, a junk peddler was here," said the man who was watering his horse in the barnyard back of the house. "He wanted to buy stuff but I didn't have anything to sell. Sold it all last week."

"Did you see a dog—a sort of reddish-brown dog?" asked Rick eagerly.

"No, I can't say I did," answered the man, who ran a small truck farm. "There was another fellow sitting out in the wagon. But I didn't see any dog."

"Did you hear one?" asked Chot, for he was trying to remember what a Boy Scout would do, and to ask questions that would bring the kind of information needed.

"Did I *hear* a dog—that's so, I *did* hear one!" exclaimed the farmer. "Come to think of it I did hear a dog whining and whimpering in the junk wagon. I didn't pay much attention then—though it was only half an hour ago—maybe a little more. But I did hear a dog!"



"Near the log cabin stood a junk wagon."

"Then it was Ruddy—I'm sure it was!" exclaimed Rick. "Oh, fellows, come on! Maybe we'll have him, soon, now!" [Pg 183]

Hardly stopping to thank the man for his news, though Chot did remember to fling back, over his shoulder, a hasty "much obliged," the boys hurried on.

"We're hot on the trail now!" exclaimed Chot, recalling some of the things his Boy Scout friends had said. "We'll get him!"

It was getting dusk now, but the three chums hardly noticed this. Along the road they raced, looking for a sight of the junk wagon. And, as they came to a lonely stretch they saw, off to one side, in a field a small house—a log cabin it really was, and near it stood a ramshackle old vehicle—a junk wagon beyond a doubt.

"Fellows, we've found it!" cried Rick. He pointed toward the old log cabin. Yes, there was no doubt of it. There was the junk wagon, but there was no sign of horse, or men or Ruddy, the dog. [Pg 184]

CHAPTER XV

RUDDY AND THE SAILOR

Just before it was time for his master, Rick, to come home from school that afternoon, Ruddy had been peacefully sleeping on the side porch, in a place where the sun shone down, making a warm spot. Ruddy liked to sleep in warm places. So did Sallie, the cat. Perhaps Sallie loved warm places even more than Ruddy did, for dogs can better stand the cold than can cats, even though they have warm fur.

And suddenly, when Ruddy was sleeping, and perhaps dreaming, for it is said that dogs do dream, all at once there sounded on the other side of the hedge that separated the Dalton yard from the street, a low whistle.

It was not the kind of a whistle with which Rick had been in the habit of calling his dog, nor was it the kind of a whistle that Haw-Haw, the crow, had learned to imitate.

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But Ruddy heard the whistle, and instantly he was awake, sitting up with ears lifted to catch the slightest sound. Ruddy looked toward the hedge, for though he could not see very well he could hear better, and smell best of all. And he could hear well enough to know that the whistle came from the other side of the hedge.

Now if dogs think, and I am beginning to believe more and more that they do something very like thinking, Ruddy must have reasoned something like this:

"Hello! Here's Rick home from school ahead of time! He must have been a good boy and the teacher let him out early. Now for some fun!"

Ruddy knew about the time that Rick came home from school each day. Ruddy could tell time a little. I mean, by this, that he knew at about what hour each day certain things would happen. He always knew it was meal time, though of course he could not look at the face of the clock and tell at what hour the hands pointed. I doubt if he could have told which were the clock hands and which were the black figures. But Ruddy knew when it was time for his meals, and he had come to know about the time Rick came home from school each day. And now, as he heard the whistle, the dog thought it was his master who had arrived ahead of the usual hour.

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Ruddy was not much surprised at hearing the whistle. True Rick, of late, had given up uttering the shrill call from away down the street as he ran from school. It was this call that Haw-Haw had imitated and so often puzzled the dog. This which Ruddy had heard was a different whistle, such as Rick often used to call his dog back, when the two of them were racing over the fields, and the setter would run too far ahead.

"Now for some fun!" thought Ruddy, in the only way dogs can think. "Rick's home and we'll have a grand race!"

Ruddy must have known it was not the crow whistling this time, though whether he recalled seeing Haw-Haw asleep in the warm corner behind the stove I cannot say.

Anyhow, up jumped Ruddy, and, with a joyous bark, he leaped over the hedge, at a low place, and found himself on the other side.

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And then came a big disappointment. For Rick was not there at all. Instead there was a ragged man, a man whose face needed shaving, a man whose scent Ruddy remembered only too well—a man whom the dog feared.

"O ho! You came when I whistled all right; didn't you?" spoke the man in a low voice. "I thought you would! I thought I'd find you if I sneaked around long enough. Now I've got you back, maybe I'll have some luck!"

Ruddy was too surprised and frightened to leap back over the hedge and take refuge in the house of Rick. As soon as he saw the man he remembered, with pain and fear, the days he had spent in the company of the ragged sailor—for this is who the man was.

Ruddy crouched down, growled as was natural at the sight of an enemy, and then he whined, for he saw the man raise his hand and the dog knew what happened when the heavy hand fell.

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But this time, for some reason or other, the sailor did not strike the dog. Perhaps he saw that Ruddy was crouching down and was afraid, and thus he knew that he had mastered the poor animal.

"Tisn't as if you ran away from me!" growled the man. "You didn't do that. A wave carried you overboard, same as it might me. You didn't run away, but now I have you back. I guess I'll have luck from now on, for I'm going to keep you."

Of course Ruddy did not understand this talk. All he knew was that there was the man he had grown, even in a short time, to fear and hate. The very smell of the man was hateful to the dog, for it is by the smell, or personal odor, that a dog remembers his friends and enemies.

After the first fear, the first crouching, growling and then whining Ruddy might have leaped up and gotten away. But a setter is not like many dogs. Ruddy did not have the fierceness of the bulldog, nor the suspicion of a collie. He was an affectionate, loving dog, ready and willing to make friends with everyone who was kind to him, and fearing those who were unkind to him. And that is why, being afraid, he crouched down, and waited for what was to happen, instead of running away.

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And, a moment later, the sailor reached down and caught Ruddy up in powerful arms, held one hand around the dog's nose, or muzzle, and hurried with him toward a waiting wagon.

It was a junk wagon, and on the seat was a dirty, ragged man with a straggly black beard. He seemed to be waiting for the sailor, who had jumped off the wagon to take Ruddy.

"I got him!" cried the sailor, as he hastened back to the wagon. "I got him. Maybe, now, I'll have some luck!"

"Um!" was all the junk man answered.

The sailor took a bag from among the bundles of papers, and quickly tied it around Ruddy's head. The poor dog struggled and howled faintly, and even tried to bite the man, as was natural. But he could not get away, and his howls, rather faint as they were, effectually were muffled in the bag.

"There you are!" growled the sailor, as he finished tying the bag around Ruddy's head. "I guess you won't get away! But I'll make sure!" [Pg 190]

With some bits of rope, of which there were many in the junk wagon, the sailor tied Ruddy's legs. Then he let the dog stretch out among the old pieces of iron, burst automobile tires, paper and other trash in the junk wagon.

"You won't get away now!" growled the sailor. "Come on! Drive along that old bundle of bones you call a horse!" he ordered the junk man. "We got to get out of here! That boy may be along any minute, and I don't want him to see me!"

"You goin' t' sell de dog?" asked the junk man, who had agreed to help the sailor. On his part the ragged old man of the sea had promised to help the junk man unload his wagon that night. "You goin' t' sell him?"

"Sell him? No, I guess not! Think I want to sell my luck? I never had any luck since this pup was washed overboard! That's why I wanted him back. Now I got him."

"But what good is he if you can't sell him?" asked the junk man. To him everything was measured in value by how cheaply he could buy it and how dearly he could sell. [Pg 191]

"Oh, a dog's good for something else than selling," declared the sailor. "They bring you luck! I'm going to keep this one. Course I'll have to watch him that he don't run away, but when I get him on a ship he can't run off. I've got him all right now!"

And, surely enough, the ragged sailor did have Ruddy. It had all happened so quickly—the stopping of the junk wagon outside the Dalton house, the whistling of the sailor, the carrying off of the dog—it had all happened so quickly that Ruddy himself hardly knew all the details.

Mrs. Dalton had not seen Ruddy leap the hedge. She had heard a low whistle, just before Rick came racing home from school, but she had not thought much about it, and she certainly did not know that Ruddy had left the porch, in answer to the call, and had been captured by his enemy.

And now Ruddy was being taken away in the junk wagon.

"Drive along!" ordered the sailor. "I want to get off this street. Too many kids here would know this dog if they saw him; he won't stay covered up!" he exclaimed, for Ruddy was struggling, trying to get his head loose and to work the ropes off his legs, and these struggles disturbed the old sacks the sailor had thrown over the dog to hide him in the bottom of the wagon. "Drive on, fast!" said the sailor. [Pg 192]

"But I should must stop and buy things!" declared the junk man. "All right it is for you to say a red dog he brings you luck. He brings no such to me. I of got to buy paper and rags and bottles and old auto tires, and I of got to sell 'em to make money."

"All right, but hurry all you can!" growled the ragged man—in fact they were both ragged men. "I want to get out of town and back to a ship," he added. "Then I'll have some luck!"

And so the ramshackle old wagon rattled down the street, stopping only at Mrs. Blake's candy store, where Rick and his chums received their first clue or information.

Then the junk wagon drove out of Belemere, just as the boys had been told, and as evening was coming on the junk man headed his outfit toward the old log cabin. [Pg 193]

"What are you going to do here?" asked the sailor in the gruff, growling voice that seemed natural to him.

"I can leave my horse and wagon here for the night," was the answer. "I do so—lots of times. Nobody ever here comes along—the place is too lonesome."

"Going to leave your horse and wagon here, eh?" spoke the sailor. "What are you going to do? What am I going to do—and the dog?"

"For me, I should go on a little further to a friend of mine in the same business," said the junk dealer. "I can sleep there for the night, and he will make room for you and the dog—cheap, too. You do not of need to feed the dog."

"Well, if you're going on to a friend's place, why don't you drive there and leave your horse and wagon?" asked the sailor. "What's the use of stopping half way?"

The black bearded man smiled to show how very white his teeth were amid his dark whiskers. Then he said: [Pg 194]

"You should not of understand. He is a business rival and he might see what I have bought. Besides, anyhow, he maybe would want to sell me some feed for the horse, and I can let him stay here to eat the grass where it doesn't cost even a penny! We leave the horse in the cabin, and the wagon outside. Me, I go to my friend's house and buy my supper and a bed. If you want to sell the dog maybe he'll buy—he buys lots of things."

"No, I'll not sell him," was the gruff, growled answer. "I'm not going to sell my luck. I've got a few shots left in the locker. I can pay for my supper and a bed, and a bone for the dog. I'll go with you."

The junk wagon was driven from the road close to the old log cabin, the horse was turned out to graze on the free grass at the rear of the shack, and the junkman and the sailor started down the road. The sailor took the bag off the dog's head, unbound his legs, and led him along with a cord around his neck. Poor Ruddy slunk along, half dragged by the ragged man. The dog tried to hold back but it was of no use.

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CHAPTER XVI CAMPING OUT

Rick, Chot and Tom—the three boys who were trailing the dog that had been taken away by the ragged sailor—came to a stop as they saw the old log cabin in the lonely hollow just off the road.

"We've found it!" Rick had said, and this was true enough as to the junk wagon. But there was no horse, no men and certainly not a dog. If Ruddy had been there you may well believe he would have been running around, if free. And as soon as the wind had brought to his sensitive nose the scent of his boy master he would have run to Rick with leaps and bounds and joyous barks.

"What'll we do?" asked Tom.

"Let's go up there and get back Rick's dog!" exclaimed Chot.

"But maybe Ruddy isn't there," suggested Tom. "I don't see him, and maybe that isn't the junk wagon we're looking for."

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"I'm sure it's the right wagon," spoke Rick. "But I don't see Ruddy. And I don't see any horse."

"Whistle for him!" advised Tom.

"Whistle for the horse?" Rick wanted to know.

"Whistle for the dog, I mean. If he's there he'll come out to you. Maybe he's inside the log cabin. I wonder what it's for, anyhow? I have never been over so far on this road before."

"This is a log cabin that a gun club used to use when they shot at targets," said Chot. "Some of us Boy Scouts stopped here one day and cooked our dinner. The gun club doesn't use the cabin any more."

"It'd be a fine place to camp out—if there weren't a lot of junk men in it," declared Tom. "Go on and whistle for your dog, Rick."

"But don't whistle too loud," advised Chot. "If the old junk man, and the sailor who must have rode with him, are there we don't want them to hear us. All we want is the dog."

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"That's so," agreed Tom. "Course we ought to have that man arrested for taking Rick's dog. But no use looking for trouble. If we can get Ruddy back that's all we want."

"I'll whistle," offered Rick.

He puckered up his lips and gave a low, but clear call—one he often used to summon Ruddy. But this time there was no answer. Ruddy did not burst out from under a bush, or from among the weeds, as he frequently did, with dried leaves clinging to him when he had nosed in among them seeking the cause of many strange, wild smells.

"Guess Ruddy isn't there," said Rick, with a sigh, after several whistles.

"Come on; let's go up and look!" advised Chot. "Maybe they've got him hidden inside the cabin."

The boys hesitated a moment. They were not very big nor old, and the idea of facing two grown men, one of whom had been bold enough to entice away, or steal, Ruddy, was a little alarming at first.

"Oh, come on!" said Chot, desperately enough. "There's nothing to be afraid of! We got a right to help Rick get back his dog!"

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And so, rather timidly it must be admitted, they went through the fence, at the bars where the junk wagon had found a passage, and approached the cabin. They could see the wagon more plainly now. It was filled with odds and ends of the sort of junk which the men who collect it seem to make money on. There were bundles of papers, part of a broken stove, the spring of a bed, some old auto tires and bags of rags.

"It's funny he left it here without the horse," said Tom.

"Maybe his horse lost a shoe, same as an automobile gets a puncture," said Rick, "and he had to take his horse to a blacksmith shop. So he left the wagon here."

"Maybe," agreed Chot. "But blacksmiths aren't open after dark—anyhow the one on our street isn't."

"Well, anyhow here's the wagon, but the horse is gone and so are the men and so's Ruddy!" spoke Tom.

But at that instant there was a noise that seemed to come from behind the cabin. It was a loud noise. [Pg 199]

"What's that?" cried Tom.

For a moment his two chums were so startled that they could not answer. Then, as the strange sound came again, Chot said:

"It's just a horse whinneying!"

"The junk man's horse," added Rick.

And so it was. They saw the animal a moment later, tied by a long rope to the back of the log cabin. The horse looked up and stopped chewing a mouthful of grass he had just pulled. He had whinneyed as he heard the footsteps of the boys and their voices. Perhaps the horse thought his master was coming to give him a drink of water or take him to a stable.

However, the junk man's horse went to cropping grass again when he saw that the boys were evidently not coming any nearer to him.

"Ruddy isn't here," announced Rick, looking across the fast-dimming meadow back of the log cabin. Night was falling rapidly now, for the long, summer days were at an end, and autumn would soon give place to winter. "My dog isn't here!" and there was a catch in Rick's voice that sounded as though he were going to cry; but he didn't. [Pg 200]

Again Chot was walking around, leaning over close to the ground. Suddenly, out near the place in the fence where the bars had been taken down, to allow the wagon to be driven in, Chot lighted a match.

"He's been here!" he cried, pointing to something in the moist earth. There was a patch where the grass, from the side of the highway, had grown partly over the road. It was a spot seldom touched by horses, autos or wagons. And here the earth was damp because, not far away, was a trickling rill of water. "He's been here!" exclaimed Chot.

"Who?" asked Rick.

"Your dog! I can see the marks of his feet! Look, those are a dog's tracks!"

Surely they were the marks of some animal, and when Rick looked more closely at them, in the light of another flickering match, he knew they were made by a dog's paws.

"I wonder if it could be Ruddy?" he murmured. "I wonder?"

"Sure it was," asserted Chot. "I'm a Boy Scout, and I know a lot of different animals' footprints. I can tell a rabbit's when I see 'em in the snow. This is your dog all right, Rick!" [Pg 201]

"But where is he?" asked the boy, whose pet had come to him out of the ocean.

"He must be somewhere around here," spoke Tom. "I guess the junk man and the sailor drove here, and left the wagon for the night. Then they went on somewhere else with your dog."

"But where did they go?" asked Rick.

"That's what we got to find out," said Chot. "I'll tell you what we've got to do," he added, drawing his chums toward him, and speaking in a low voice, though no one but the two boys was within hearing distance, as far as the lads knew. "We got to stay here until that junk man comes back after his horse and wagon. Then we'll make him tell us where the dog is."

"S'posin' he won't?" asked Tom.

"We'll make him! If he hasn't got your dog, Rick, maybe the sailor has, and we'll find out where he went. We've got to stay here until that junk fellow comes back. He'll come all right. He won't go away and leave his horse and wagon." [Pg 202]

"Where can we stay?" asked Rick.

"In the log cabin, of course," answered Chot. "Some of the older Boy Scouts camp out here two or three nights. There's a fireplace in the cabin where you can cook, and an old oil stove; and there's some sleeping bunks. Course it isn't real good, but Boy Scouts don't mind."

"Do you mean we should stay camping out here all night?" asked Rick, and his voice had a strange awesome note in it.

"Sure, stay camping here all night—or until the junk man comes back," answered Chot. "Why not?"

"I'd have to ask my mother," Rick said. "I promised to be back before night, and it's almost dark now."

Chot thought this over a moment or two before answering.

"I'll tell you what we can do," he said. "We'll all go back home—we got to get things to eat,

anyhow, and some blankets. Then we'll come back here and stay all night."

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"All alone?" asked Tom.

"There's three of us," retorted Chot. "I stayed out all night once with some Boy Scouts. Course we had the Scout Master with us——"

"Oh, well, no wonder!" cried Tom.

"Well, maybe I can get our Scout Master to come back with us now and stay all night," went on Chot. "He'd like it. That's what we'll do! We'll go back home, get something to cook for supper, bring some blankets and stay all night. We'll camp out in the log cabin. It'll be lots of fun!"

"Will you sure get the Scout Master?" asked Rick, to whom the idea was appealing more and more strongly.

"Sure I'll get him!" promised Chot. "He'll come. Now come on! Let's hurry back home and get the things."

They started on their way, down the now almost dark road, and then Rick happened to think of something.

"S'posin' the junk man and the sailor come back while we're gone?" he asked. "Then how we going to get Ruddy?"

"I didn't think of that," admitted Chot. "Let's see," he said, musingly. "We passed a house a ways back, just before we saw this cabin. We could stop there and ask 'em to sort of keep an eye on this shack until we get back."

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"Yes, we could do that," agreed Rick. "But it's going to take us a long time to go home and come back."

"Oh, maybe we'll get a lift," suggested Chot, always a hopeful sort of chap.

They had better luck than they expected. At the nearest house to the log cabin, where they stopped, they told their story of how they were searching for Ruddy. The place was a farm, and a boy who lived there belonged to the Scouts, though not to the same troop of which Chot was a member.

"I'll go down and keep watch on the place 'till you get back," offered this boy. "And I'll stay with you all night, if dad'll let me."

"That's fine!" exclaimed Rick and his chums echoed this sentiment.

And they had not finished talking about this before the farmer, who had heard their story, not only gave permission for his son to help, and aid in standing guard through the night, but also offered to run Rick, Chot and Tom over to Belemere in his auto.

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"I'll bring you back, too!" he said.

"Oh, I'm sure we'll find Ruddy now!" declared Rick, who was both excited and delighted.

There was some more excitement when he reached home. His parents were beginning to be alarmed about him. But he quickly told what had happened, and as the Scout Master, summoned by Chot over the telephone, agreed to accompany the boys back to the cabin, Rick was allowed to go with them.

"Oh, I do hope he'll be all right!" said his mother. "He's never been away from home like this before!"

"It will do him good, and we can safely trust him with the Scout Master," said Mr. Dalton.

"Oh! oh!" Mazie had exclaimed when she heard the plans. "Are you going to sleep in the cabin all night, Rick?"

"Well, I won't sleep *all* night," he answered, as he rolled up his blankets and took his bundle of food. "We got to stay on watch, some of us, to catch the junk man, or the sailor, if he comes back with the junk fellow, to get his horse and wagon. That's how we'll get Ruddy."

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"Oh, I want Ruddy! I love him!" said the little girl, and in thinking about the lost dog she did not feel so much fear at having Rick stay away from home over night.

But, even in spite of the confidence Mr. Dalton had in the scout master, Mrs. Dalton was nervous.

"I'll take good care of him—never fear!" Harry Taylor, the Scout Master, promised with a smile, as the boys piled in the auto for the ride back with the farmer. "I won't let him get even the snuffles!"

"That's what I'm afraid of—having him catch cold!" said Rick's mother.

But she wanted her son to be a manly boy, so she let him go. And you may well believe there were joyous hearts in the little party of lads who were on their way to camp in the old log cabin. It was more than a mere camping crowd—they were trying to catch the man who had Rick's dog!

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CHAPTER XVII THE TWO SAILORS

While Rick, his boy chums and the Scout Master were on their way to the old log cabin, there to camp all night, if need be, to wait for the sailor to come back with the dog, poor Ruddy himself was not having a very good time.

He had been lifted out of the junk wagon by Matt Stanton, the ragged sailor who had stolen Ruddy away "for luck," as he called it. And Ruddy was half dragged along the road by a rope the sailor had tied around his neck.

Ruddy growled and whined and whimpered. If he could have talked man-language, instead of only in dog fashion, he would have said:

"Don't you know you are hurting me, pulling me along like this? You are almost choking me! If you won't pull so hard I'll come along just the same. Of course I don't want to come with you, for I don't like you. I like Rick, the boy, best. But you are stronger than I am, and we dogs have to do as our masters want, even if we don't like it. But, oh dear! how I wish I were back with Rick!"

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That is what Ruddy was most likely saying or thinking to himself as the sailor half dragged him along. The junk man, whose name was Ike Stein, walked on ahead, down the road, after having left his horse and wagon near the old cabin.

"Where's this friend of yours, where we're going to stop all night and have something to eat?" grumbled the sailor as he walked along, pulling Ruddy after him. "Where's his shack?"

"Only a little farther now," the junk man answered. "It's down of the road and over by in the woods. You can't see it from here, but it isn't far."

And, a little later, the junk man left the road, and started down a path that led across the fields toward a clump of woods. As soon as Ruddy saw this path, and smelled the clean smell of woods and leaves, he gave a little joyous bark.

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"Here now! What's the matter with you? Keep still!" growled the sailor, pulling on the rope around the dog's neck.

Poor Ruddy's tail dropped and he crouched down, for he feared he was going to be struck. But the sailor was not quite as bad as that. He rather cared for the dog, in a way, though he did not know how to be really kind to animals. Some men and boys are that way, and I am sorry for them. It is wonderful to know how to love animals, and have them care for you.

So the sailor growled and shook his finger at Ruddy to make him keep still, and Ruddy whimpered and did not bark again.

"First thing I know you'll be bringing a crowd around us, and somebody may take you away from me," grumbled the ragged man. "I don't want that. I don't want to lose my luck again."

And the only reason Ruddy had barked half-joyously when he smelled the woods was that he remembered how he and Rick had used to romp among the trees and dried leaves, having glorious times.

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"Come along now!" growled the sailor, and again he jerked on the rope around Ruddy's neck. "How much farther is it?" he asked of the junk man.

"Oh, just a little ways," was the answer. "We'll of come to the house in a minute." He looked behind him, as if to make sure no one was following, and then added in a whisper: "My friend, he lives down in an old house away off in the trees. He doesn't of want anybody to know he's there."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed the sailor. "Sort of hiding away, is he? Well, I've done that myself."

They walked on a little farther, the sailor still dragging Ruddy along, and at last the two men pushed their way through some bushes and came to an old, tumble-down house, that did not seem a much better place to sleep in than was the old log cabin.

"Here we are," said Ike Stein, the junk man. "Here we are!"

The sailor looked about him, shook his head once or twice, and then said:

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"Well, I guess we can stand it here for one night, eh, Ruddy?"

He called the dog the same name as did Rick—the name that just seemed to fit the setter. And Ruddy looked up and wagged his tail just a little, for these were the first kind words the sailor had spoken to him.

"Yes, I guess we can stand it here one night," went on the ragged sailor. "Where's your friend?" he asked the junk man, "and where's something to eat for me, and a bone for my dog?"

"Oh, my friend he will of be right out," promised Ike Stein, rubbing his hands as though giving them a dry wash to get off some of the dirt. "He's most probable of looking at us now from one of the windows."

"Oh, he is, eh? Spying like! Well, I don't see him!" said the sailor glancing from one broken

window to another.

"No, Sam doesn't like to be seen until he sees who his company of is. But he knows me all right. Hello, Sam!" he called and a voice answered:

"Hello, Ikey!"

Then from the old, ramshackle house there came a man who looked almost like the junk peddler, except that he was not as clean, if such a thing could be, and his beard was longer and blacker. [Pg 212]

"Here's a friend of mine, Sam," went on Ikey. "We have come to stay all night and have supper. We'll pay, of course," he added, for he saw that Sam was going to say something.

"Oh, sure you may stay—if you pay!" spoke the man who lived in the tumble-down shack. "Did you bring your horse and wagon?" he asked.

"I left them down the road," answered the junk man. "Now we of are hungry."

"And so is the dog, I expect," growled the sailor. "Give him a bone—Sam."

"A bone? A bone for the dog? It should of cost you five cents, or for a bigger one ten cents," was the answer.

"Well, give Ruddy a ten cent bone!" exclaimed the sailor. "Here's your money," and, dipping his hand down in his ragged trousers, as though he were diving into the water, he fished up a dime, which he threw to the junk man's friend. [Pg 213]

The second ragged man—whose name was Sam, went into his house and came out with a bone which he threw down in front of Ruddy, who, by this time, had been tied to a post in the yard.

"Hum!" mumbled the sailor, as he looked at the bone. "It's a good thing I bought a ten cent one. If you'd handed out a fiver there wouldn't have been enough meat on for a spider crab. Well, now the dog's eatin' let's us eat!"

"Right away!" promised Sam, and he led the way into the house.

"Mind you don't try to run away from me again!" growled the sailor, shaking his finger at Ruddy.

The poor dog, smelling a little good meat on the bone, had lain down with it between his fore paws and was gnawing it. He had no intention of running away just then. He was too hungry, and this was his supper. It was not like the good supper he would have had at home in his kennel, where Rick always fed him. But it must answer now.

Sailor Matt Stanton looked around the old ramshackle house as he and the junk man entered. It appeared to be filled with the same sort of trash and odds and ends that Ike gathered in his wagon. Sam Levy was in the junk business also, only he bought the things the other men gathered up in their wagons, and sold them to the larger dealers in bottles, rags and paper. He was a wholesale junk dealer and the others were retailers, you might say. [Pg 214]

The three men went to the kitchen of the old house, and Sam began to cook a meal. It was now quite dark, and a lantern hung on the wall did not give a very good light.

Sailor Matt looked about him while waiting for his meal. He saw piles of rags, larger stacks of papers, old pieces of iron, torn automobile tires and other junk.

"I only do a small business," said Sam, looking around from where he was bending over the stove, making some sort of a stew in a broken kettle. "I only been here a little while. Lots of folks don't know I'm here at all—only my friends, like Iky and you."

"You needn't call me a friend," growled the sailor. "I ain't friends with nobody since I got out of luck losing my dog. Now I have him back maybe I'll get a ship, and start over again." [Pg 215]



"A man came in—a sailor like himself."

"Maybe," muttered Sam, "and maybe we should of be friends. If you got anything to sell I gives you a good price."

"I've got nothing to sell, and not much money to buy anything," grumbled the sailor. "But I got enough for a meal. Hurry it up!"

"Sure, it'll be ready in a minute!" promised Sam.

He was stirring the contents of the broken kettle when a step was heard outside. Instantly the three men looked around, and Sam stopped rattling the long-handled spoon.

"Somebody's comin'!" whispered Ike Stein.

Sailor Matt Stanton got up from a pile of rags and started toward the door. As he reached it a man came in; a man who, it could be seen almost at first glance, was a sailor like himself.

"What ho, mate!" cried the newcomer in a jolly voice. "Well, well! To think of finding my old sailing chum here! Shake, Matt! How are you and what's the matter with the dog howling out in the yard?"

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He clapped on the back the ragged sailor who had taken Ruddy away from Rick.

"Hush! Not so loud!" exclaimed Sailor Matt, in a hoarse whisper. "Keep still, Jed Porter! Keep still!"

"What for?" asked the sailor called Jed. "Why should I keep still? Anybody would think you were afraid of being found out!" And he laughed heartily, at which sound the junk man quickly pulled down a window while Sam hurried from the stove and shut the door that had been left open.

The two sailors stood looking at one another, while out in the yard poor Ruddy howled and whimpered.

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CHAPTER XVIII

SCOUTS ON THE WATCH

"Now, boys!" said Scout Master Harry Taylor, as Rick and the others reached the old log cabin, "if we are going to camp out here and find Ruddy, we must go at it right."

"Can we build a fire and cook things to eat?" asked Rick, as he put on one of the rude bunks the bundle he had brought from home.

"Oh, yes, we'll cook and eat," the Scout Master promised with a smile. "I guess you haven't done much camping out, Rick," he added.

"No," was the answer. "But I like it, and I'm going to be a Boy Scout after this."

"It's lots of fun!" declared Tom. "Come on, Rick, and help me get wood."

"I'll make up the beds," added Chot.

"And I'll help," said a voice in the door-way of the log cabin. Sam Brown, son of the farmer who had taken the boys to Belemere and brought them back, had come to join the others as he had promised. He was going to do what he could to help get Ruddy back for Rick. [Pg 218]

"That's right," said Master Harry Taylor, "each Boy Scout must do his part when camp is to be made."

Several lanterns had been brought with them, and, by the light of one, Rick and Tom gathered some wood outside to make a fire on the hearth. Chot and Sam did what they could to set the interior of the log cabin to rights, and Mr. Taylor opened the bundles of food and filled the oil stove from a kerosene can he had brought with him.

Each boy had a "mess" outfit, consisting of tin cup and plate, a knife, fork and spoon and a small frying pan. Chot had borrowed an outfit from a boy friend, for Rick, as Ruddy's master, was not yet a Scout.

In a little while a fire was blazing on the hearth, and the steaks which had been brought were being cooked by Mr. Taylor over the hot embers. He decided to do this himself rather than trust the boys, for if the meat were spoiled in the broiling some one would have to go hungry, no extra supply having been provided. The coffee was made on the oil stove. [Pg 219]

"Say, this is fun!" exclaimed Rick, as they sat about the old table and ate off their tin plates. "I didn't think being a Boy Scout was half so jolly!"

"Oh, you haven't seen a quarter of it!" declared Chot. "Wait until you camp out in the open; eh, Mr. Taylor?"

"Yes, that is quite different from this," answered the Scout Master. "This is quite a luxury, having a log cabin, even if it is an old ramshackle one."

"Oh, I'm going to do this every time I have the chance," said Rick. "But just now I want to find Ruddy."

"And we're here to help you," said Mr. Taylor, who though older than any of the boys was still "one of them." If he had not been he would never have developed into a good Scout Master. "I think the best we can do," he added, "is to keep watch. As you boys said, the junk man will probably come back, either to-night or early in the morning, to get his horse and wagon. When he does we will ask him what he did with Ruddy." [Pg 220]

"I think the sailor took him," Rick said.

"Well, perhaps he did. We'll find out. And to do that we'll have to keep watch. We'll take turns, as sentries do in the army. After we finish eating and get the bunks ready we'll divide into watches."

"Oh, this sure is fun!" cried Rick, with eager, sparkling eyes. The novelty of camping almost made him forget, at moments, the loss of Ruddy. But not quite.

"I can't see why the junk man left his horse and wagon here and went away," said the Scout Master, as the rattle of knives and forks on the tin plates told that little more remained to be eaten.

"Maybe he ran away because he was afraid of being caught," suggested Chot.

"No, I think not," spoke Sam Brown. "There's another junk man located somewhere around here. He hasn't been here long, and he stays in an old tumble-down house near the swamp, I guess. There used to be gypsies there, but they went away." [Pg 221]

"Do you think the sailor took my dog there?" asked Rick.

"Maybe," answered Sam. "We can look."

"But I think it would not be wise for us to go there to-night," remarked the Scout Master, as he guessed what Rick was going to say. "Those men could easily hide Ruddy in the darkness. The safest and best plan will be to wait for them to come here, as they are sure to do."

Rick, who was going to become a Boy Scout, did as all members of those troops do—he obeyed the Scout Master, and then began the long watch and wait through the night.

The boys had brought blankets, and with these the beds were made up on the bunks which the former gun club members had built in the log cabin so some of them could sleep there when they wished.

As two of the boys would be on guard at a time, taking turns in two hour stretches, while the others would be in the bunks at the same period, there were blankets enough to keep them warm, especially as they were under shelter, rude as it was. [Pg 222]

"But if we had to sleep out in the open, we would have made a lean-to, or a wickiup, near a camp fire, and that would have kept us warm," said Chot.

"What's a lean-to and a wickiup?" asked Rick.

"A lean-to," explained the Scout Master, "is just some tree branches laid with one end raised over a pole, like the half of a letter V turned upside down. If you build a fire in front of it you can keep pretty warm. A wickiup is just some branches of low bushes or small trees bent in toward the center, and there fastened together, or you can throw a heavy blanket over them. They are both pretty poor shelters, but they're better than nothing."

And so, after the supper detail had been cleared, and the bunks made, the boys and the Scout Master sat about the fire on the hearth, talking. The heat felt comfortable, for the night was growing colder.

"Do you think we'll find Ruddy?" asked Rick more than once.

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"I think so," answered Mr. Taylor. "If that junk man doesn't come back after his wagon and horse we'll go looking, in the morning, for the old house in the swamp."

The junk man's horse had been brought around from in back, and tied near the front of the cabin.

"We can tell the moment he comes after him, if the animal is left here," said the Scout Master. "And he can't move his wagon, even in the dark, without us hearing him."

"The bells will jingle," said Tom. For the junk man, like many of his kind, had a string of jangling cowbells fastened to his wagon.

It was the turn of Chot and Tom to stand the first "trick" of night guard duty, and this was to be from ten to twelve o'clock. Rick and Sam would take the second watch, from midnight until 2 o'clock in the morning, and the Scout Master, and Sam's brother, Pete, who had come over after supper to ask if he couldn't share in the fun, would be on guard from two until four o'clock. After that it would be the turn of Chot and Tom again.

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"Hark!" exclaimed Rick, as he and Sam were preparing to turn-in to the bunks where they were to sleep. "I thought I heard something!"

They all listened, but the only noises were those made by the chirping of the crickets and the songs of some late-staying Katy-dids.

"I guess the junk man's horse moved around," suggested the Scout Master with a smile. "Don't be too quick to give an alarm, when you're on watch, if you hear an odd noise. First try to find out what it is."

Then, as night settled down over the lonely log cabin, and the others went to their bunks, Tom and Chot began their tour of guard duty. They could spend it outside or inside the cabin as they chose, and, as it was rather cool, they would probably be most of the time inside.

"But you can hear if the junk man comes back," said Mr. Taylor. "And, if he does, sound the alarm."

And so the watch of the night began. Rick found it hard to go to sleep at first, not being used to this bunk style of bed. But Sam and his brother Pete were soon breathing heavily and regular, which showed they were not lying awake. As for the Scout Master, he seemed to have dropped off into slumber as soon as he wrapped up in his blanket.

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But at last Rick's eyes closed and he, too, was soon, if not in Dreamland, next door to it.

But while the boys were in the old log cabin, quite a different scene was taking place in the ramshackle house where the sailor had taken Ruddy, tying the dog outside. When the second sailor appeared, making so much noise that the others were afraid, for some reason or other, Ruddy had whimpered in lonesomeness and fear.

"What you going to do with that dog?" asked Jed Porter, the second sailor.

"I got him for a mascot—to bring me good luck!" answered Matt Stanton. "And if anybody takes him away from me I'll—"

"Not so loud! Don't make so much noise, mine friends!" whispered Sam Levy. "I don't want the farmers around to know I do a junk business here. They think this old place has of nobody to live in it. I don't want them to come and bother me."

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"You see, sometimes, by mistakes, my friend he of gets things here that belongs to the farmers," explained Ike Stein, the driver of the junk wagon. "So as he doesn't want to be boddered with farmers of coming here to look for maybe their chickens or ducks."

"Oh, so that's what you do!" exclaimed Jed Porter, who had a broad, smiling face, quite different from the rather sneaking looks of Matt Stanton. "Well, it isn't any of my affairs, of course. I'm not going to stay, anyhow. I just happened to be passing and I saw a gleam of light through the trees, so I walked over to see what it was. I'm hungry!"

"The meal, he will be ready soon," said Sam. "Your friend, he should of pay for you; will he?" and he looked at the second sailor as he asked this question.

"He might pay it with some of the money he took from me," growled Jed, "but I don't s'pose he will! I'll pay for myself!"

"I'll pay you back as soon as I have better luck, and I will have it now I've got the dog," whined

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Matt. He acted as though afraid of the other sailor, and well he might be for he had not been honest with Jed, and had taken some of Jed's money.

"Now don't laugh with such a loudness, and make so much of noisiness," whispered the old man who lived in the ruin of a house. "We don't want anybody coming here!"

"All right," agreed Jed, as he sat down and began to eat, while the others did the same.

The two junk men talked together in low tones after supper. Matt, the ragged sailor, stretched out on a bundle of rags as if to go to sleep. Jed took a piece of newspaper from his pocket and began to read by the light of a smoking lamp, and poor Ruddy whined and whimpered outside.

After a while Sailor Jed got up and started for the door.

"Where you going?" demanded Matt.

"Out for a breath of fresh air," was the answer. "Too hot in here."

"Take the dog a bone," requested Matt. "I guess he's hungry. He can have the one I left on my plate," he added quickly, as he saw that Sam was going to object. [Pg 228]

"Guess there isn't much meat on any bone *you* picked!" was the remark of Jed. "But I'll give it to him."

He carried the bone out to Ruddy, who cringed low when he dimly saw, and heard, and keenly smelled the man coming toward him.

"Poor fellow!" spoke the sailor in a low, kind voice. "You needn't be afraid of *me*. I won't hurt you. I love dogs, and I'm sorry Matt Stanton has you. He won't exactly kick or beat you, but he won't be kind to you. And you look as if you had come from a better home than he'll ever give you."

Jed looked back toward the house where the light dimly glowed. Then he looked down at the cringing dog, tied by a heavy rope.

"I'll do it!" suddenly whispered the sailor to himself. "I'll do it! 'Tis a shame to let Matt keep you. I wonder, if I cut you loose, if you can find your way home? I'll try it."

He whipped out his knife, and, with one sweep, cut through the rope, close to where it was tied around Ruddy's neck. The dog felt that he was free. He could scarcely believe it. [Pg 229]

Pausing only long enough to lick the hand of the sailor who had thus been so good to him, Ruddy, with a low whine of delight, sped away in the darkness of the night. [Pg 230]

CHAPTER XIX A BARK IN THE NIGHT

Ruddy, the brown setter dog, free from the rope which had held him to the cellar door of the old, tumble-down house, ran swiftly off through the night.

"I hope you know which way to go," softly said Sailor Jed, as he turned to go back to the kitchen where the others were. "Yes, I sure do hope you know how to steer a straight course back to your friends. I won't tell Matt I cut you loose, then he won't come after you until morning. Maybe, by then, you'll be safe at home."

And so, as Ruddy ran on through the darkness, the good sailor went back in the old, ramshackle house.

"Is the dog all right?" asked Matt.

"Yes, he's all right," and Jed smiled, but not so Matt could see him. "I hope he'll be more all right than he would be with you," he thought to himself. [Pg 231]

And now we must follow Ruddy for a while, until we see what happens to him.

Ruddy's nose was as keen on the scent as ever, in fact more so, for now he was eager to get back to Rick, the boy master whom he loved so well. And, though it was dark, Ruddy had hopes of finding Rick.

As I have told you dogs can not see very well, and they can not hear as well as can some other animals. But their sense of smell is wonderful, and it was on this that the setter depended to take him back to home and Rick.

So, in a way, it did not matter much about the dark. It was better for him that it was dark, as the sailor who had taken him from Rick's house would not see the brown dog running away.

"Ha! This is the path I came! This is where he dragged me with a rope around my neck after he took me out of the wagon," said Ruddy to himself, dog fashion, as he ran along in the darkness, his nose close to the ground. I don't mean, of course, that Ruddy said that out loud, or that he even thought it, as you or I would think it. But he thought, and he knew, in his own dog way, that he was on the right track back toward the place where he had been taken out of the wagon. [Pg 232]

By running with his nose close to the ground Ruddy could smell where his own paws had left a scent on the earth. He could also catch the scent of the junk man and the sailor who had walked along with him. And Ruddy's nose was so keen that he could tell where the sailor had stepped and where the junk man had left his shoe marks on the roadside path. To Ruddy each person had a different scent, just as to us, even over a telephone when we can not see them, each of our friends has a different voice.

"Yes, this is where they led me along, after they took me out of the wagon," thought Ruddy, dog fashion. "I'll soon get back to that place. Then—well, after that, I'll have to do the best I can."

Ruddy was doing what is called, by hunters, "back-tracking." That is he was following the scent back to the place where it had started from. In running after game birds, and animals, Ruddy, or any other dog used for that kind of sport, generally does just the opposite. That is they follow the scent along until they get to the place where the rabbit, squirrel or bird has *gone*, and not to the place where they have *come from*. Once in a while, though, a hunting dog will make a mistake and "back-track" when he ought to "front-track." A dog that does this is not of much value to a hunter, for the man with the gun wants to go where the game *is*, not where it *isn't*. [Pg 233]

So Ruddy, running through the night, with his nose to the ground, traced his way along the path where he had been led with the rope around his neck. As yet he had caught no scent of his master, for Rick and his friends had not come this far. They had not gone more than a hundred feet beyond the old cabin, after seeing there the junk man's horse and wagon.

"I certainly want to find Rick," was the thought that kept coming again and again into Ruddy's mind. "I want to find that Boy!"

Once or twice Ruddy got off the trail. He was a young setter, and they often make mistakes. And the errors Ruddy made were because other dogs and different animals had crossed his tracks since he had made them. [Pg 234]

Twice he caught the scent of other dogs. Who they were he did not know, of course, being a stranger in the neighborhood. But they probably were animals living on the farms nearby; and they had crossed Ruddy's trail, very likely catching a whiff of his scent as he did of theirs.

Once Ruddy caught the odor of a rabbit which had leaped across the road to get a drink of water from a spring that bubbled up under a rock. At any other time Ruddy would have followed this trail of the rabbit, barking joyously to call Rick to follow. That is Ruddy would have done this if his boy master had been with him.

But it was no time, now, to be chasing after rabbits.

And once the brown setter caught the scent of a squirrel that had leaped down out of a tree after a nut it had dropped. For a moment Ruddy stopped, and lifted his nose in the air. He had a notion he would like to trail that squirrel, and find where it had its nest in a hollow tree. True the nest would be high up, out of Ruddy's reach, for the dog could not climb like a cat. But if Ruddy trailed the squirrel to its tree the dog could bark joyously at the foot, to show he had done his work well. [Pg 235]

But it was no time, now, to be chasing after squirrels.

So Ruddy shook his head, sneezed a little as if to get the smell of the rabbit and squirrel out of his delicate nose and ran on. He was hungry, for there had not been much meat, even on the ten cent bone, but Ruddy forgot his hunger in his great desire to get back to Rick.

And he was weary, for he had not been kindly treated after the sailor had tied him in the junk wagon. But he forgot about being tied, also as he hurried on through the night.

Along the silent country road he went, up the hill, still keeping his nose close to the ground so as not to lose his own scent. It was still "warm." That is it had been made within a few hours. And the longer a scent lies on the ground the harder it is for a dog to trace it. That is why dogs are said to be "hot on the scent," the meaning being that the game has passed along only a little while before. [Pg 236]

It is supposed that rabbits, squirrels and other animals each have a scent of their own, and it clings to the ground for some time, even as the smell of perfume clings to a handkerchief after it has been washed.

Pretty soon Ruddy came within sight of the old log cabin. He knew when he was there even before he could see it, for he could smell it, and smell the place where he had walked near it.

But besides this smell there was another. The smell of boys and a man. And among the boys' odors was one that made Ruddy's heart beat faster as he caught it.

It was not the scent of Rick, for the boy master of the dog was inside the cabin, whence the odor did not come out so plainly. But Ruddy caught the smell of Chot, with whom he had played almost as often as he had with Rick.

"Here's a friend of mine! Here he is!" Ruddy would have said, if he could have talked our language. "I know that smell! It's almost the same as Rick's! Oh, I wonder where Rick is?" [Pg 237]

And then Ruddy raised his head and gave a bark—a short, sharp joyous bark in the night. A bark that said, as plainly as could be said:

"Here I am, Rick! Where are you! I smell a smell I know—a smell that seems to be a part of you! Where are you, Rick?"

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CHAPTER XX OVER THE SNOW

Chot and Tom, standing the first guard watch outside the log cabin, had been walking around it, now and then stepping inside to get a drink of water. They did not go far away, for what they wanted to see, if such a thing should happen, was the coming back of the sailor or the junk man.

For the first hour of their watch nothing had happened. It had been too early, perhaps. And perhaps the junk man had no idea of coming back for his horse and wagon until morning. At any rate Tom and Chot walked silently around the log cabin, now and then listening to see if they could hear any strange noises.

They heard noises—plenty of them—noises of the night, but they were not strange to these boys who had lived much of their lives in what was part country and part town.

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There were the chirp of the crickets, the disputing calls of the Katy-dids and the Katy-didn'ts, the whistling call of the tree toad and, now and then, the distant bark of a dog. As I have told you, the sound of a dog's bark carries a long way, especially at night.

"Wonder if that's Rick's dog?" asked Tom of his chum in a low voice as they met in front of the log cabin door.

"It might be," agreed Chot. "I hope we can get Ruddy back."

"So do I," added Tom.

The two boys had divided the cabin neighborhood into two sections. Each one walked half way around the shack at intervals, so that part of the time they met in back, and part of the time in front, like two coast guards meeting each other on their beach patrols.

After a while it grew more silent as the creatures of the night ceased their calling, and seemed to go to sleep. It was colder, too, and Tom and Chot were glad they had put on warm clothes. But they rather liked the time they were having. As Boy Scouts they had often camped out, but never for the reason they were now doing it—to help a chum get back his dog.

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"Well, our time is 'most up," remarked Tom, as he looked at the radium-dial of a wrist watch his father had given him. "It'll soon be twelve," he added.

"Then Rick and Sam will come out," spoke Chot. "Wouldn't it be funny if Rick should find his own dog when it was his turn to be on guard."

"It would be dandy!" said Tom. "But I guess——"

All at once the two boys heard a little crackling and rustling in the bushes which grew almost up to the old log cabin.

"Someone's coming!" whispered Chot.

"Yes," agreed Tom, in a low voice. "I wonder who it is?"

And just then there came the bark of a dog close at hand—the bark of a dog in the night.

Hearing it so near, Tom and Chot, for the moment, were quite startled. Then Chot exclaimed:

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"It sounds just like Ruddy!"

He spoke aloud and the dog heard him—heard his own name. This was enough for the brown setter, for he it was who had barked. He had smelled his way back along the path over which the sailor had led him, until he reached the log cabin. Then had come to him the odor he knew so well—the scent of Chot with whom Ruddy had romped and played.

Then Ruddy barked loudly—the first, real bark he had given since he had been cut loose by the good sailor. And it was this bark that Chot and Tom heard.

"Do you s'pose it is Ruddy?" asked Tom.

"I hope so," murmured Chot.

Then the dog heard more plainly the voices—the voices of boys whom he knew. It was almost as good as if he had heard Rick's voice.

Once more Ruddy barked, and then he sprang forward, straight toward the cabin and the two lads on guard. Dimly, in the darkness of the night, Tom and Chot saw a dog bounding toward them, along the path that led to the front door of the old cabin.

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"There he is!" cried Tom.

For a moment Chot thought perhaps it might be some other dog, maybe some half-wild sheep-

killing dog that had come to dispute with them for the possession of the old cabin. But, an instant later, Ruddy was leaping and barking about his two friends, trying to get into their very arms, it seemed, he was so glad to be back with them again.

And how he did bark!

"Where's Rick? Where's that boy Rick?" Ruddy seemed to be saying.

"Oh, Ruddy! You did come back! We've found you! Rick will be so glad!" cried Tom. "We must tell Rick that Ruddy is back!" he added.

Chot rushed into the cabin and shook Rick, who was asleep in one of the bunks.

"Get up! Get up, Rick!" Chot called.

Slowly and sleepily Rick opened his eyes.

"What's the matter? Is it my turn to stand watch?" he asked.

And then he was almost smothered by the rush of Ruddy, who fairly threw himself upon the bunk which held his master, and the dog filled the cabin with his loud bark, so that Scout Master Taylor and the other boys were awakened. [Pg 243]

"What is it? What's the matter?" asked the Scout Master, for he slept off in one corner, and all he could see, in the dim light of the lantern, was a mass of moving forms—several boys and a dog.

"Ruddy's come back!" cried Tom. "Ruddy is here!"

"He came up to us when we were on guard outside," explained Chot. "And he barked!"

"Is it really Ruddy?" asked Mr. Taylor.

"Oh, yes, it's Ruddy! It's my dog all right!" cried Rick. And it needed but one look to show how glad the dog and his boy-master were to be together again.

Then the lantern was turned higher and, when matters had quieted down a little, it was seen that Ruddy carried around his neck a collar of rope.

"He's been tied up!" exclaimed Rick. "The sailor and the junk man must have tied him up so he couldn't get away."

"And he broke loose," said Tom. [Pg 244]

"No, this rope has been cut," said the Scout Master, as he looked carefully at the end of the heavy cord on the dog's neck. "This has been cut by a sharp knife. If some one tied Ruddy up some one cut him loose."

And so, without having seen it done, Mr. Taylor told exactly what had happened. He had read the "signs," just as Indians and scouts of the plains used to read signs, and as Boy Scouts of to-day are learning to do.

"Ruddy had a regular collar on," said Rick, as he looked at the harsh rope around his pet's neck. "I wonder where it is?"

"Well, I guess the junk man took it off to sell it," said Sam Brown. "Those fellows will sell anything they get that way."

"I'll cut this rope off," went on Rick. "It may hurt him."

"Hadn't you better leave it on?" asked Tom. "You'll want to tie him up, Rick, so he won't be taken away again."

"Oh, I guess nobody will take him now!" boasted Rick. "He'll stay right in here the rest of the night."

And that is what Ruddy did. The dog was given some food and water and then he lay down beneath Rick's bunk and refused to move from there. Ruddy knew when he had found what he wanted. [Pg 245]

Of course there was no more need of standing guard that night. As the recovery of Ruddy was all that was desired, Mr. Taylor said there was no use in sitting up, just to catch the junk man and sailor.

"We have your dog," he said to Rick, "and the most we could do would be to have the men arrested. And perhaps it would be hard to prove that they really enticed Ruddy away. So let them go, if they come."

But they did not return during the night, neither the sailor, nor the junk man after his horse and wagon. For the rather bony steed was still tied to the old log cabin and the wagon load of junk was in the grass-grown yard in the morning.

"Well, now we'll have breakfast and go home with Ruddy," said Rick, as morning dawned and the boys, rather stiff and cold it must be confessed, arose and stretched themselves out of the bunks. They had been obliged to "double-up" when it was decided that it was no longer needful to stand watch as the bunks were only intended to hold four. [Pg 246]

"Yes, we'll be getting back," the Scout Master said. "We have just about enough food for breakfast."

"Won't you come up to our house?" invited Sam Brown. "Mother will be glad to have you."

"Yes, come on!" urged his brother Pete. "I'll run ahead and tell 'em you're coming," and before they could stop him he had sped away. He came back a little later shouting:

"Come on! Mother's all ready for you! She's going to have pancakes and sausage and hot coffee and syrup and gravy and everything! Come on!"

And you may well believe that Rick and his friends did not pass by an invitation like this.

Ruddy had a good breakfast, too, though he did not eat at the table with the boys and the Scout Master. And between bites the boys told the farmer and his wife of the events of the night.

"Those junk fellows ought to be cleaned out!" declared Mr. Brown. "They're as bad as the Gypsies! We farmers will have to get together and drive 'em away." [Pg 247]

After breakfast preparations were made for the boys to go back to their homes. As it was Saturday there would be no school, so they planned to have a good time after reaching Belemere.

"But first I want to take a look at the log cabin," said Mr. Brown. "If those junk fellows are around I'm going to give 'em notice to clear out."

However he did not have that chance, for when Rick and his friends reached the old log cabin where they had camped out for the night the junk man's horse, and the wagon loaded with odds and ends, were gone.

"They came and got 'em while we were eating!" exclaimed Mr. Brown. "They must have been watching their chance."

And, very likely, the men were. At any rate there was no further sign of them, and as Rick had Ruddy back, and as it was thought best not to get into a dispute, just then, with the junk men living in the ramshackle old house near the swamp, nothing was done about it. [Pg 248]

"But we farmers will get together and drive those fellows out!" declared Mr. Brown. "If they'll take dogs they'll take other things, especially now with winter coming on. We must clear them out!"

Then Rick, with Ruddy following joyously, the dog now and then running back and sniffing at the legs of the boys, started for home.

"We did what we set out to do," said Mr. Taylor, "and that is generally the way with Boy Scouts. But we didn't do it in just the way we planned."

"But we got Ruddy back!" exclaimed Rick, "and I'm going to be a Boy Scout!"

"That's the way to talk!" cried Chot.

Mr. and Mrs. Dalton and Mazie listened eagerly to the story Rick told—of the night spent in the log cabin, and how Ruddy came back.

"But who cut him loose?" asked Rick's father.

"That's what we don't know," said the boy. "It must have been somebody who liked dogs."

And it was not until some time later that they heard about the sailor, who, with his knife, slashed the rope that kept Ruddy a prisoner. [Pg 249]

For several days after this adventure Rick kept close watch over Ruddy, as, indeed, Mrs. Dalton did when Rick was at school. The whole Dalton family, as well as the boys and girls in the neighborhood of Rick's house, had come to know and care for the brown setter. The setter is a very lovable sort of dog, not perhaps as strong in character as a bull, a collie or Airedale, but of a disposition that makes you love him in spite of the tricks he sometimes plays.

But as the days passed, and neither the ragged sailor nor the still more ragged junk man was seen in Belemere, Rick began to feel that his dog was safe.

"I guess he won't try to take him again, Rick," said Sig Bailey, the coast guard. "And if I see that sailor along the beach again I'll tell him what I think of him!"

But the sailor did not come again for a long time.

Winter was now at hand. Several times the clouds had seemed to promise snow, and the hopes of the boys and girls who had sleds rose high. But the hopes came to naught, for the clouds blew away without sending down the sifting, white flakes. [Pg 250]

At last, however, the glorious days of winter really came. One morning when Rick jumped out of bed and looked from the window, he saw a sight that gladdened his heart.

"Oh, Mazie!" he cried. "It's snowing! It's snowing!"

And Mazie took up the happy cry:

"It's snowing! It's snowing!"

Down in the kitchen, where he was having a warm breakfast, Ruddy barked joyously.

"Oh, what fun we'll have!" chanted Rick. "We'll ride down hill, we'll make a snow man, a snow house, a fort and everything! Oh, what fun we'll have!"

And Rick and the boys did have fun. So did the girls. So did Ruddy and his friend Peter, the bulldog, floundering about in the snow. It was ever so much more fun for the dogs to play in the snow than in the rain, just as it is more fun for boys and girls to scatter the white flakes rather than dodge the pattering drops of water.

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As Rick had said, there was coasting and the building of snow houses. Snow men were made, and pelted with snowballs. Snow forts were built on the hills and the boys divided into soldier companies and had battles with snowballs.

One day when Rick had been coasting with the other boys he had stayed so late that it was almost dark. One by one his chums went home after long, swift rides over the snow-covered hill, but Rick and Ruddy remained on the slope. One or twice Rick took Ruddy down on the sled with him, and the dog seemed to like the swift motion, just as dogs like auto riding.

"One more coast and we'll go!" said Rick, as he saw that he was the last boy left on the hill. His sister Mazie had gone home some time before, telling Rick he had better hurry or he would be late for supper.

"One more ride!" the boy told himself.

He got on his sled. Ruddy, who had been capering about until he was tired, lay down in the snow at the top of the hill. Rick gave himself a push and started down the steep grade.

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Just how it happened he never knew, but his sled must have struck a stone, or some obstruction, and in a moment it went off the side of the hill, down into a deep gully, filled with a deep, white drift.

Into this drift plunged Rick, head first, sled and all. And down into the soft snow he fell. At first he was not alarmed, for he had often rolled from his sled into a drift. But this drift was different. At one edge was a big rock, and Rick's head struck on this.

In an instant all seemed to get black before the eyes of the boy—much blacker than the blackness of approaching night. A queer, dizzy feeling came over Rick. He appeared to be sinking away down deep—as if into the depths of the ocean out of which Ruddy had come to him.

And the last thing Rick remembered was the distant barking of his dog. Then the boy fell into the drift, making a hole as he plunged into the soft mass of snow. Down, down he went, he and his sled. And then Rick disappeared from the view of Ruddy up on top of the hill.

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CHAPTER XXI THROUGH THE ICE

How long he lay in the blackness, which was caused by the blow on his head, Rick did not know. But when he opened his eyes, to find himself lying half under his sled which had fallen with him, it was dark all about him—that is, all dark except a faint light which came from the snow pile into which he had tumbled. That made a gleam of whiteness even when all else was black.

"I wonder—I wonder what happened?" asked Rick, speaking in a faint voice.

Then it came back to him—how he had taken one last coast down the hill, how something had slipped and how he had fallen down into the hole in the snow.

That was where he found himself now, and, as he opened his eyes, though his head hurt him very much as he did this, he saw the snow all about him.

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And then Rick heard the barking of a dog, and at once he knew whose dog it was.

"That's Ruddy!" he murmured. "Good, old Ruddy! Here, Rud! Rud!" he called.

The barking came louder, and Rick looked up toward the top of the hole. It was as if he were down in a well, the sides of which were made of snow. At the top he could see the sky, from which the last glow of the sun had faded, but a few stars were glittering there. And Rick saw something else. It was the head of Ruddy.

Ruddy was leaning over the hole in the snow drift, looking down at Rick who had fallen to the bottom.

"Come on down, Ruddy. Come and help me up!" called Rick, after he had tried to move and found that he could not. Something seemed to be the matter with one of his legs, and when he turned his head the least bit, he felt dizzy. It even hurt him to call to his dog.

And no sooner had Rick told Ruddy to jump down into the snow hole with him than he wished he had not done so.

"If Ruddy comes down here," thought Rick, "he can't get out either, and then we'll both be in a hole! Stay back, Ruddy! Stay back!" he called, faintly.

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But there was no need to tell Ruddy that. The setter was a wise dog, and though he very much wanted to aid his master, he was not going to run into danger himself, and so make it impossible for him to help Rick. Ruddy was a wise dog.

He had seen Rick go down in the snow drift, and at first thought nothing of it. It was not the first time Rick had toppled into the snow that day.

But when several minutes went by, and Rick did not come out, laughing as he always did, Ruddy became uneasy. He ran down the hill, almost as fast as the coasting sled had gone down, and when he came to the edge of the hole he stopped. That was where Ruddy was wise.

If he had gone on much farther he would have slipped into the drift himself, and, while he might have been able to flounder his way out, he would not have been of any use to his master.

So Ruddy stopped on the hard, firm edge of the hole, at the place where Rick had toppled in. And there Ruddy stood, looked down at his master, and barked.

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Ruddy could not see as well, by looking down into the hole of snow, as Rick could see by looking up, but the dog knew his master was there.

"Stay up there, Ruddy! Stay there!" called Rick, faintly, trying to fight off the feeling of weakness and the blackness that appeared to be trying to cover him with a heavy blanket. "Stay up there—and go get help! Go home, Ruddy!"

Ruddy barked again, and there was a different meaning to it. If another dog had been there he could have very easily have understood what Ruddy was saying. It was this:

"All right, Master! I'll go home! I'll go get help! But I just wanted you to know that I wasn't going to run off and leave you all alone. I'm going to help you, but I can't do it if I jump down there with you."

Giving a last bark, as if to tell Rick to keep up his courage and not to worry, Ruddy sprang away, and raced up the hill toward home.

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Rick had a final glimpse of his dog as the animal drew back from the top of the well-like hole in the snow. Then Rick decided to try to do something for himself.

"I wonder why I can't get up and dig my way out?" he asked himself. "I can use my sled for a shovel."

But when he tried to move he felt such a sharp pain in his leg, and his head pained him so, and he felt so dizzy, that he had to stop. The night seemed to be settling down now, blacker than ever. Rick could see no stars now, but he began to feel a warm glow coming over him, as though he had drawn near some blazing fire.

Somehow Rick remembered reading that travelers, overcome in the snow, felt this warmth before they lost their senses and froze to death. And he tried to fight off the drowsiness.

"I must wake up! I must wake up and dig my way out of here!" he said to himself over and over again. But each time he tried to move he was unable.

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And then for a time he knew nothing. He just lay there, all crumpled up at the bottom of a deep hole in the snow.

The next thing Rick knew was that he heard voices. At first they seemed to be a long way off, but they came nearer. Then he felt himself being moved, and he opened his eyes to see lights gleaming. He saw his father bending over him, lifting him up, and he heard his father's voice saying:

"Well, Rick, my boy! Ruddy did you another good turn! He brought us to you! Now you're all right!"

And somehow, though his leg still hurt him, and his head pained, Rick knew it was all right. He settled back in his father's arms, and felt himself being carried along, through a sort of snow tunnel.

And that is just the way Rick was taken out of the hole into which he had fallen with his sled. Ruddy, after leaving his master, having barked, as well as he knew how to tell him what he was going to do, had raced home. There he acted so strangely, grasping Mr. Dalton by the coat, and fairly pulling the boy's father toward the door, that Mazie cried:

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"Oh, what makes Ruddy act so funny? Something must be the matter!"

"Something has happened to Rick!" exclaimed Mrs. Dalton. "I know it!"

"I think that must be it," her husband replied. "I'll go with Ruddy and see."

Quickly putting on his hat, Mr. Dalton went out with the dog, and Ruddy showed, very plainly by his joyful barks, that this was just what he wanted.

"It's just like the time Rick fell out of the tree when he was chestnutting," said Mazie.

"But he wouldn't be climbing trees now," said Mrs. Dalton, who was beginning to get worried. "Rick went coasting."

"Maybe he went so fast that his sled climbed a tree," suggested the little girl.

And Ruddy led Mr. Dalton right to the hole down which Rick had fallen with his sled. Mazie had not guessed it quite right. The sled had taken her brother down, not up.

Flashing the rays of a pocket electric torch he carried, down into the hole in the snow, Mr. Dalton saw Rick lying at the bottom, and it did not take the father long, with the help of some neighbors who brought shovels, to dig a tunnel through the snow to where Rick was and carry him out of the drift. If they had started to get him from above they might have caved the pile of snow down on top of him. [Pg 260]

"But what made my head feel so funny?" asked Rick, when he had been taken home, put to bed and the doctor called.

"You struck on your head pretty hard," answered Dr. Wayne with a smile. "It made you partly unconscious at times, and then you got numb with the cold, and almost went too sound asleep."

"Is my leg broken?" asked Rick. "I couldn't stand up on it."

"No, it was only twisted by your fall," the doctor told him. "You will be all right in a few days."

And so Rick was, but during those few days he had to stay in bed, though part of the time he could lie on a couch and look out of the window at the snow. And all this time Ruddy never left him. The dog stayed beside his master, only going out at night to his kennel when Rick had fallen asleep. [Pg 261]

"And don't let that old sailor or the junk man get him," Rick begged of his father and mother, when it came time to put Ruddy out.

"I guess Ruddy himself won't let them come near him again," spoke Mr. Dalton.

And so there grew between Rick and Ruddy a firmer bond of love and affection than ever. When Rick grew tired of reading or of looking out of the window he would glance toward Ruddy. And the dog, who had been, perhaps, asleep on the rug near his master's chair, seemed to know the minute Rick looked at him, even if the dog's eyes were shut, for Ruddy would give a low bark of pleasure and his tail would thump the floor.

That was Ruddy's way of talking.

The winter days passed. Rick grew strong again and went out to play in the snow and on the ice with Ruddy. And all the boys wished they had such a dog as was the red setter.

There came a thaw, a rain and then a freeze. Instead of the ground being covered with snow, all the ponds, lakes and streams were frozen over. [Pg 262]

"Now for some skating!" cried Rick. And Ruddy barked joyously. For, though he could not skate, and though he slid over the ice when he tried to walk on it, still he had fun, and loved to be out of doors with his master and the other boys.

One day Rick, Chot and Tom were down on Weed River with their skates. Rick had taken Mazie with him, and while she skated with some other little girls, her brother and his chums started a game of hockey.

They were in the midst of it, and Rick's side was winning, when, suddenly, there sounded a loud, cracking noise.

"There goes the ice!" cried Chot. "Skate to shore, everybody! The ice is breaking!"

Forgetting their game, Rick and the others headed for the safe shore. But even as Rick glided along, followed by Ruddy, the boy glanced down toward where he had left Mazie. He could not see her, but he noticed the other girls fleeing toward the river bank. And then from one of them came the cry:

"Mazie's in the water! Mazie went through the ice!" [Pg 263]

CHAPTER XXII

THE SAILOR COMES AGAIN

Rick and the other boys knew what this meant—to break through the ice when they were skating. It had happened more than once on Weed River, and once, when Chot fell in, there was hard work to get him out. Rick remembered that time.

And now, as Rick heard the call of the frightened girls, and saw them running toward the shore without Mazie, his heart seemed to feel like a lump of lead. Ruddy, the dog, ran barking with the boys.

"Mazie's in the water! Mazie fell through the ice!" cried the shrill voices of the girls.

"Boys, we've got to get her out!" shouted Rick. "We got to save my sister!"

"That's what we have!" echoed Chot.

The boys turned, as soon as they reached the bank, and ran toward the place where they saw a hole in the ice. And, as Rick ran he caught a glimpse of his sister Mazie. She was down in the hole that had broken open when the ice cracked. Her head and shoulders were out of the hole. [Pg 264]

But even ahead of the boys ran Ruddy, the dog. He seemed to know something had happened, as he knew it the time Rick was caught in the tree, and when his master fell into the snow drift.

He barked loudly, did Ruddy, and he looked back, every once in a while to see if the boys were coming. And they were, you may be sure of that. Rick, Chot, Tom and the others were hurrying to save Mazie.

"How—how we going to get her out?" gasped Tom.

"Run right up to her and pull her out!" cried Chot. "She's holding to the edge of the ice. I can see her. Her head isn't under water! We got to pull her out!"

"But we mustn't run up to her!" exclaimed Rick. "If we do—we'll—go in the water, too! The ice will break with us—same as—it did with—Mazie!"

He could hardly talk he was so excited and out of breath from running. He was gasping for breath. [Pg 265]

"How we going to get your sister to shore if we don't pull her up out of the hole?" asked Tom.

"We got to get a board—or something—put it on the ice and walk out on it!" Rick answered.

"That's right!" cried Chot. "I remember now! It's in our Boy Scout book. You got to use fence rails, or something to put down on the ice when it's cracking, to hold your weight. There's a fence! We can pull off some boards."

The girls continued screaming and jumping up and down on the bank, pointing toward Mazie, who was still in the water. She was holding to the ice at the edge of the hole through which she had fallen, and she was trying to call for Rick. But she was so cold and frightened she could hardly make a sound.

"Get the boards!" cried Rick to his chums.

But Ruddy waited for no boards. He saw that Mazie was in danger and he went to help her in the only way he knew—by going straight to the hole, reaching down and catching hold of the loose shoulder of the little girl's coat. [Pg 266]

That's what Ruddy did! He ran straight over the ice toward the hole. And because Ruddy was a dog, and had four feet resting on the ice, instead of only two, like the boys, and because he was not as heavy as either Rick, Chot or Tom, the ice did not break under the dog's weight. Ruddy, standing on four feet, spread his weight over a larger part of the ice, and this is just why a board should be used by anyone who is trying to save a person who has fallen into an ice hole. A board, or two or three fence rails, will hold you up on ice that would be too thin to walk on.

So it was that Ruddy did not break through, even when he went to the edge of the hole, in which poor Mazie was floundering. He reached over, caught hold of her loose coat in his teeth, and tried to pull her out. But this was too much for Ruddy. His paws were not made for getting a good hold on the ice, and he began to slip toward the dark, cold water. [Pg 267]



"Catch hold of her, now!" cried Rick.

"Ruddy! Ruddy! Come back!" cried Rick, when he saw what was happening. "You can't get Mazie out, and you'll go in yourself."

"We'll get her out! We have the fence rails!" shouted Chot. "Come here, Ruddy!"

But Ruddy would not let go of Mazie until he saw Rick and Chot close beside him, at the edge of the hole. The boys were standing on some fence rails, and these bore them up on the thin ice.

"Catch hold of her, now!" cried Rick, and he and Chot took a firm grip, one at each of the little girl's shoulders. The fence rails were on either side of the hole, and the boys, lifting with all their strength, pulled Mazie out of the water. Ruddy ran back, barking, toward shore, when Rick told him to. Tom held the two shore ends of the rails steady so they would not slide on the smooth, hard, frozen surface.

In another moment Rick and Chot had Mazie safe on the firm ice and were hurrying with her toward the bank.

"Oh, Mazie! are you—are you drowned?" asked Edna, one of her chums.

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"No—no! I—I—I'm not drowned," chattered Mazie, "but I'm terrible c-c-c-old!"

"We got to get her home!" cried Rick. "She's got to be warm!"

Quickly the boys took off Mazie's skates, and then, with Rick on one side of her and Chot on the other, while Tom took the other frightened girls in charge, the homeward trip was quickly made.

You may be sure there was much excitement in the Dalton house when the children were seen coming along, Mazie dripping wet and with Rick and Chot holding either arm. But Mrs. Dalton was accustomed to things happening, and as long as she saw that Mazie was alive and not hurt, she did not worry, but began making ready to warm the drenched and cold little girl.

Mazie was soon dried and put into a warm bed, with a hot water bag at her feet. She was given hot chocolate to drink and when the doctor came he said she might not be any the worse off for her adventure; at least he hoped she would not be.

And Mazie was not. Aside from a little cold, which she could hardly help having, she did not suffer much from having broken through the ice.

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"Were you scared?" asked Rick, when it was all over.

"I just guess I was!" answered Mazie. "But when I saw Ruddy coming for me I seemed to know it would be all right. He saved me and he saved you; didn't he, Rick?"

"He sure did!" exclaimed the boy.

"And you and your chums did well, too," said Mr. Dalton. "You did just the right thing in getting the fence rails. I am glad to know Chot remembered some of his Boy Scout rules, and glad that you did not get so excited that you 'lost your heads,' as it is called."

"They would look funny without any heads!" laughed Mazie.

And so Rick loved Ruddy more than ever, and so did everyone who knew the dog.

The winter brought many good times to Rick and his friends, but there were no more such accidents as falling into a snow drift or breaking through the ice.

The snow storms and the freezing nights began to pass away. Spring was near and though Rick liked winter he was glad the days were coming when he and his dog could roam over the fields and through the woods; when he could toss sticks into Weed River or Silver Lake, and have Ruddy swim out to get them and bring them back. [Pg 270]

One day, when Rick had come home from school, after a little April shower, and when it seemed as if May flowers were just ready to bloom, he fed his pet crow, Haw-Haw, and then ran to Ruddy's kennel.

"Come on boy! Now for a run!" cried Rick.

And Ruddy, with a joyful bark, seemed to answer:

"Here I am, Rick, ready and waiting for you!"

As dog and boy ran toward the front gate, and as Rick gave his cry of "*Ee-oh!*" to call Chot to come out and have fun, a strange, harsh voice snapped out:

"There he is! There he is!"

And down the street came the old ragged sailor! [Pg 271]

CHAPTER XXIII

HAPPY DAYS

Ruddy growled. Rick stood very still, and then, slowly, his hand went out to grasp his dog's collar, to hold him against being taken away. As for the ragged sailor he just stood there, smiling at Rick.

And somehow, as the man smiled, it seemed to make Rick feel better. He was not so much afraid. But still he kept hold of Ruddy's collar.

And then, suddenly, that harsh voice called again:

"There he is! There he is!"

It reminded Rick of a time he had once been to an entertainment in the school, when a ventriloquist had seemed to make a wooden doll, which he held on his knee, speak as though alive.

The voice appeared to come from the ragged sailor, yet the strange man of the sea had not opened his lips. [Pg 272]

And again came the harsh cry:

"There he is! Over the fence with him! Ha! Ha! The stormy winds do blow! Do blow! Do blow!"

And then, with a start of surprise, Rick saw, crawling up from behind the sailor, and sitting on his shoulder a green parrot. And the parrot, as he pulled himself along the sailor's coat, using claws and his big, hooked beak, opened his mouth, stuck out his queer, thick black tongue and cried:

"Ship ahoy! Where away! Two points off on the weather bow! Bow wow! Bow wow!"

Ruddy uttered a growl and started forward, his eyes fixed on the green bird, but Rick pulled him back.

"Quiet, Ruddy! Down!" spoke the boy in a low voice, and Ruddy, with one look up into his master's face stretched out at his feet. Ruddy, like a good and well-trained dog, had learned to mind, and a dog that will not obey is of very little use, even as a pet. [Pg 273]

"Well, I've come back, you see!" said the sailor, and he reached up his hand to stroke the gaily-colored feathers of the parrot. "I've come back."

"Yes—yes," said Rick, slowly. "I—I see you!"

"And do you see my parrot?" went on the sailor. "Do you see Poll? Look at her!"

Indeed Rick was looking at the green bird, and the parrot, as she heard her name spoken, screeched out:

"Pretty Poll! Very pretty! Polly bite!"

"No you don't!" quickly exclaimed the sailor, shaking his finger and tapping the bird's beak. "If you bite not another cracker do you get for a week!"

"Ha! Ha! Pretty Poll! Pretty Poll! Over the fence is out! What ho! Sail ho! Ho! Ho!"

Thus cried the green parrot, and then from the woodshed came another voice, almost like that of the bird on the sailor's shoulder.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" was shouted from the wood shed. "Get up! Get up! Whew-ew-ew-e-e-e-ah!" and a shrill whistle ended the jumble of queer sounds, at which Ruddy barked again.

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"Have you a parrot, too?" asked the ragged sailor, in surprise.

"No, that's Haw-Haw, my tame crow," answered Rick, who still stood close to Ruddy, as though guarding his dog.

"A—a crow!" the sailor exclaimed. "I didn't know they could talk."

"Haw-Haw can't talk very much," answered Rick. "But he whistles a lot. He whistles like I do, and—and you must have whistled like me or my crow once!" he went on, and fear began to come into his eyes. "You whistled like Haw-Haw and Ruddy went out and——"

"Yes, I know," said the sailor. "That's what I came back about."

"Do you mean about my dog—about Ruddy?" asked Rick and there was a catch in his voice. "Have you come back——"

"Yes, I came back about your dog," spoke the sailor.

"Are you—are you going to take him—away?" asked Rick in a low voice. He remembered how he had come to own Ruddy—the dog who had suddenly appeared out of the sea, after he had prayed one night. Now here was the sailor, looking as though he were going back to the sea, for, besides the parrot, he had a satchel. Was he going to take Ruddy to the ocean? That was the thought in Rick's mind.

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And then the sailor smiled—he smiled in a way that, better than words could have done, told Rick everything was all right. And even Ruddy seemed to understand that matters were going well for him, as he thumped his tail on the ground. And that always is a sure sign with a dog—a sign that he is pleased, happy and knows that he is with his friends.

"Yes, I have come back, but not to take your dog away," said the ragged sailor. "He's your dog—he did belong to me once, but I know he'll be happier with you. I don't want him now."

"Don't you—really?" cried Rick.

"No, I'm not going to take him. That's what I came to tell you," went on the sailor. "I'm on my way back to go aboard a ship for a long sea voyage, but Ruddy isn't going with me."

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"What is all this, Rick?" asked his mother, coming out to the sidewalk. She had heard voices, and had seen the ragged man, with the green bird on his shoulder, standing at the gate talking to Rick. And she remembered about the ragged sailor and the junk man. "What is all this?" she asked.

"I came back, lady," spoke the ragged sailor, taking off his hat and making a bow, "I came back to tell your boy he needn't worry any more about losing his dog. I am not going to try to get him back, though he once belonged to me. I have another mascot now. I have something else to bring me good luck. Here she is!" and he pointed to the green bird on his shoulder.

"Hip hurray! What ho! What ho! The stormy winds do blow! Do blow!" cried the parrot.

"You mean that you are not going to try to whistle Rick's dog away again?" asked Mrs. Dalton.

"That's it, yes, lady," answered the sailor, with another bow. "I did whistle the boy's dog away, and I'm sorry for it. You see the dog belonged to me, and he was washed overboard in a storm. After that I had nothing but bad luck. Maybe it was because I wasn't as good to Ruddy as I ought to have been."

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"Anyhow when I found out where he was, from talking with some fish men, I made up my mind to have the dog back. So I sneaked around until I found him, and then I whistled for him. I'm a pretty good whistler. I can whistle like some birds. Listen!"

And then such shrill, trilling and sweet piping whistles came from the sailor's lips that Haw-Haw, the crow, tried to imitate them and answer, and Ruddy barked joyously, while Rick and his mother looked and listened with wonder.

"Say, but you can whistle!" cried Rick. "That was great!"

"Yes, I have a knack that way," said the sailor. "Well, after I took your dog away in the junk wagon I thought I was going to have good luck. But I didn't. We went to the old house near the swamp, and there I met another sailor. I wasn't good friends with him, for once I had played a mean trick on him. And, just to get even with me, I suppose, he went out in the night and cut loose the dog I had tied up."

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"Oh, so that's how Ruddy got loose, was it?" asked Rick.

"That was it; yes," answered the ragged sailor. "At first I was mad at Jed Porter, but afterward I was glad. Then he and I got to be friends again, and he gave me this parrot."

"Pretty Poll! Pretty Poll!" shrieked the green bird.

"She always calls herself that when you mention her," went on the ragged sailor. "Well, as I say, after I had the parrot I began to think she would do me as a good luck mascot, instead of the dog, and she did. I began to do better right away. Now I have a chance to sail on a long voyage aboard a good ship, and I'm going to take Polly with me."

"Over the bounding waves, we sail, we sail, we sail!" shrilled the bird. "What ho! The stormy winds do blow!"

"Now please keep quiet a minute until I finish," called the sailor, shaking his finger close to the bird's beak. She opened it but did not bite. [Pg 279]

"I've taught her not to," the sailor went on. "Well, as I was saying, when I had this parrot for a mascot I felt I didn't need the dog. So I stopped around to tell you not to worry any more. I'll never whistle him away again."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Rick. "Now you belong to me forever, Ruddy!" and he put his arms around the setter's neck.

"Yes, he's yours forever," said the sailor. "He was mine, but I give him to you. A dog that could get to shore after being blown overboard the way he was, is a good dog!"

"Yes, Ruddy is a good dog, and we all like him very much," said Mrs. Dalton.

"And I'm sorry I caused you so much trouble in taking him away," concluded the sailor, as he picked up his valise and was about to travel on.

"Oh, we had fun camping out, and I'm going to be a Boy Scout," said Rick. "And Ruddy's going to belong, too!"

"That'll be fine!" said the sailor. "Well, now having said all I'm going to, I'll haul up my anchor and get under way. Good-bye!" he added. "Good-bye to you, lady, and to you, boy and you, Ruddy, the red dog! I'll never trouble you again! I'm off on a long voyage!" [Pg 280]

And with a wave of his cap toward Mrs. Dalton, he swung his valise up on one shoulder while, with the parrot perched on the other, he walked slowly down the street.

"Good-bye! Oh, my eye! Ho! Ho! The stormy winds do blow!" cried the green bird.

And that was the last Rick saw of the sailor and his parrot for a long time.

"But now you're mine, Ruddy! Mine forever!" cried the boy, and then he threw a stick far down the street and the setter raced after it.

Chot came out of his yard with Tom. The two boys saw the leaping dog.

"Ee-o, Ruddy! Ee-o!" they cried.

"Ee-o!" answered Rick. "Oh, fellows! Come here! I have such a lot to tell you!" he added.

And you may be sure Tom and Chot opened their eyes in wonder when they heard about the ragged sailor and his green parrot good-luck mascot. [Pg 281]

"Well, I'm glad Ruddy is yours to keep, and that you don't have to worry about him being whistled away again," said Chot.

"So'm I," added Tom.

"Come on, now, we'll have some fun!" said Rick, and then boys and dog raced over the meadow toward Weed River.

This was the beginning of many happy days for Rick and Ruddy, and Haw-Haw, the tame crow, shared in them, for, having seen the parrot perched on the sailor's shoulder, Rick taught his black pet to do the same trick, and also some new whistles.

And on the bright and breezy days of spring and summer you might have seen Rick, Ruddy and Haw-Haw playing about in the fields, or near Silver Lake, whereon the white swans floated. But Ruddy never chased them, now, and so the setter did not have to flee in terror from the big birds. Ruddy had learned his lesson.

"Oh, but you are the best dog in the world, Ruddy!" said Rick, over and over again. "What good times we'll have!" [Pg 282]

And they did have many adventures. If you would like to read more about the boy and his dog I may write another book. I think I shall call it "Rick and Ruddy in Camp," but, as for this volume, we have come to

THE END

Transcriber's Note:

Irregular hyphenation e.g. "bow-bow" vs. "bow wow", "good-luck" vs. "good luck" is as per

the original. Punctuation errors corrected without note. The following typographical errors have been corrected:

Page

[18](#) the deep, cast up by the churning of the waves [had "deap"]
[61](#) weeds in it, at certain times ["at" was "as"]
[80](#) Ruddy circled about in the leaves [had "Rudy"]
[126](#) known that he could not open the trap ["he" was "the"]
[162](#) Rick gave a shrill whistle ["Rick" was "Ruddy"]
[189](#) a man with a straggly black beard [had "straggily"]
[271](#) a ventriloquist had seemed to make [had "ventroquist"]
[272](#) Ruddy uttered a growl and started forward [had "forard"]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK RICK AND RUDDY: THE STORY OF A BOY
AND HIS DOG ***

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