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ROOKIE





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ROOKIE



HIS EARS DROOPING, MOURNFUL-EYED, AND SOPPING WET

ROOKIE

BY ELISHA FLAGG, JR.

PICTURES BY JAMES
MONTGOMERY FLAGG



ALBERT WHITMAN & CO.

CHICAGO

1940

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R O O K I E

*H*E was left one day by Uncle Ed, who asked us to take care of him until he was ready to go North for the summer. I asked what name he answered to and Uncle Ed said, "He doesn't, but I call him Rookie, short for Stupid."

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Well, I thought at the time, that doesn't sound so entertaining, but maybe he's being slandered. So I looked down upon what had been wished on us with an impartial eye and found Rookie looking up at me with a couple of very partial eyes, head cocked on one side and ears raised as though he smelled a rat, which was a doubtful compliment to my presence.

I went over and sat down, leaving Rookie sitting like a paper weight in the middle of the carpet.

To test Uncle Ed's possible libel, I called out, "Rookie! Oh, Rookie! Come over here to your new papa, you wooden-legged cross between a Walrus and a Bronx cockroach." You will of course recognize the fact that I was addressing a

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wire-haired terrier and a pup at that, otherwise I wouldn't have been so facetious!

Rookie looked like any other young thoroughbred of the species and anything but stupid. He had that appealing grotesquerie about him which always gave me a friendly feeling of risibility whenever or wherever I saw the breed. This little clown had the color and markings of an unevenly cooked pancake—sort of cream-brown black and gray. A bath later on showed him to be just white and tan, to my surprise. I had forgotten at the moment that his owner was an artist, and that artists seldom wash little dogs, nor use nail files or combs except at funerals, weddings or under ether.

To get back to Rookie, not that either

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of us had moved, I found that the only result of my call was an effort on his part to take some of the dust out of the carpet with his tail. So I went over, picked him up, wriggle and all, and returning to my chair parked him in my lap and devoted about twenty minutes to getting acquainted.

At first he insinuated that I needed a shave by trying to lather my face with his tongue. I finally distracted him from that pastime by giving him his own tail to bite, and while he was thus occupied I had time to tell him a few puppy love stories and a couple of dog-eared fairy tales such as *The Big Bad Wolf*, *Ferdinand the Bull* and *Rip Van Winkle*. The latter put him to sleep.



HE INSINUATED THAT I NEEDED A SHAVE

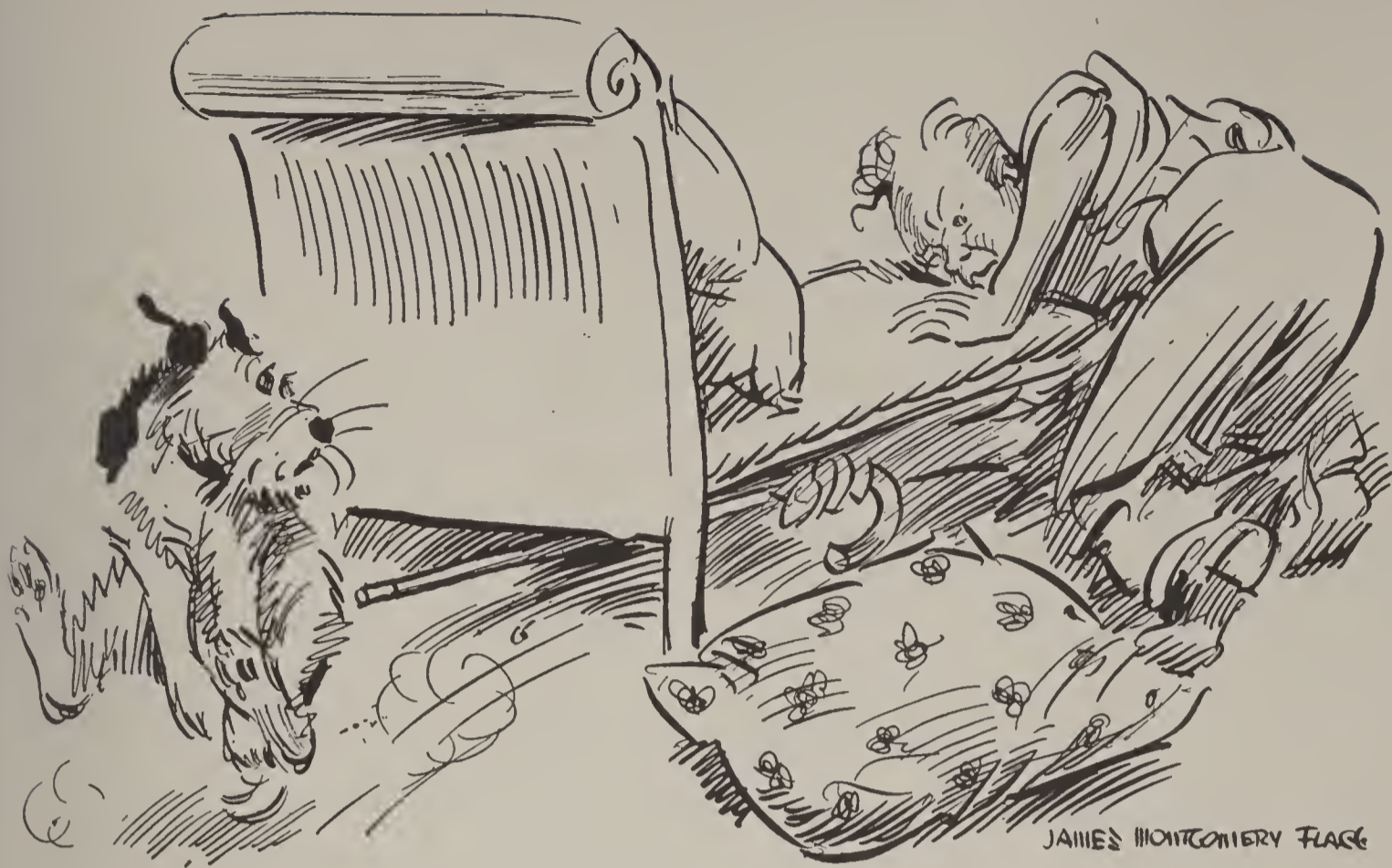
R O O K I E

By the end of the week we were great friends and I had discovered that he was of that desirable type known far and wide, mostly far, as the one-man dog. He simply would have nothing to do with *anybody* but me, outside of a few select old friends whom he had never seen before, such as the Ice Man, the Milk Man, the Gas Man, the Electrician, the Plumber, the Carpenter, the Gardener, the Garbage Collector, **** 4 stars for the Garbage Man, the Installment Man, and the—well, no. I must omit the Landlord from the bounding enthusiasm of his limited circle. The Landlord was old-fashioned and carried a package of asafetida in his pocket for rheumatism.

Saturday night arrived, and as there

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was nothing to hinder, I thought I would insist on making the new member of the family conform to the rules by taking a bath. Of course, I was ridiculous, thinking I could make him *take* a bath. I found it a whale of a job to *give* him one. The occasional baths administered in his short past must have been attempted on Saturdays also, his attitude showing a pre-knowledge of coming events. I approached him with nonchalance and said, "Come along, young feller, you'll need your umbrella," using the indirect method of speech supposed to be popular with babies who, nine times out of ten, if they could speak their minds would say, "My dear parent, your obscure innuendoes are a lot of bologny."



HAVING DISLODGED HIM WITH MY CANE

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Rookie back-pedaled so fast under the sofa that he bumped his head in passing the danger zone. The yelp of indignation he gave, when translated, meant "Ouch! You big slob!" Having dislodged him with my cane, Joan made a grab for him, but all she got was "a hair of the tail of the dog who didn't bite her," and he started away from there.

The trail led into the dining room, then around the table, out into the hall, up the stairs, in and out of two bedrooms, through a connecting bath, finally ending in the garret, where, it being dark, I caught him by his sniff—not his scruff—the dust betrayed him.

We took the struggling bundle of conscientious objection down to the cellar

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and through our combined efforts I managed to hold him in a big agate basin of warm water while Joan soaped and scrubbed until his fleece was white as snow. After a cold shower and a brisk rub with a warm turkish towel, we carried our reconditioned model upstairs to the living room, where I placed him before the glowing, crackling logs of the fireplace to remove all dampness before his bedtime.

A jumping spark from one of the logs spoiled my good intentions, however, for Rookie, with a startled "Woof!" proceeded to imitate a Chinese pinwheel, three bunches of firecrackers and a couple of skyrockets. In other words, he went off in all directions at once. Round and round



HE WENT OFF IN ALL DIRECTIONS AT ONCE

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the living room he raced, sliding first on one ear, then sliding on the other, as the rugs one by one slid from under him on the polished floor. The electricity in his hair, his bath and towel rubbing, had given him such a feeling of pride that he imagined himself a member of the Palm Beach Kennel Club running *ahead* of the mechanical rabbit.

On about the fifth or sixth lap he decided to stop in full career, so, using his hindquarters as a brake, he skidded in a sitting position to the living room door. I'll never know whether this direction was intentional or not. Anyway, it suited him fine. Getting drunkenly to his feet, he dashed madly on through the door and up the stairs, ambitiously trying to take two

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at a time; with the result that he traveled four flights in one and used up so much energy he had to call a halt on the top landing. Here, tongue out and bellows going, he looked down on us bewilderedly as though saying, "Now who the devil started all this?"

We had put aside the dressing room of the downstairs bath as Rookie's sleeping quarters. Here he had his basket, blanket and pan of water, solid comfort for any pup, but almost standard equipment for many thousand humans today.

I had in three weeks' time trained Rookie to get up from wherever he happened to be at my call: "*Come* on. Bed-time!" Then he would make for the kitchen door to prance, hop and wriggle,



“NOW WHO THE DEVIL STARTED ALL THIS?”

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demonstrating he was prepared for his nightly run round the back yard enclosure with all it was supposed to include. It took three more weeks to make him stop kidding me. Upon his return to the kitchen, habit had taught him to make for the Hoover cabinet that contained his bone-shaped puppy biscuits where, having received one, he would dutifully carry it off to his sleeping basket and call it a day—sometimes.

He became fond of us. At any rate, we were allotted our just share of his universal and enthusiastic affection. We had a hard time keeping him intact for his real master's return, for Rookie was as obstinate as a mule in his efforts to run away. The little four-legged hitchhiker in fur

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pants! I don't believe he used his thumb, though maybe he did use his tail. Or perhaps he winked. However, he was brought home to us three times in an automobile, and he always managed an expensive model. He never told me the secret. In two of the instances, friends of ours recognized him and obliged. The third instance, his identification tag and a stranger's honest good nature returned him from three miles away where he was headed for Boston and way stations.

No matter how careful I was of the chicken wire that guarded the back-yard enclosure, Rookie would manage to find an opening between the stakes I had driven down and dig his way out. Then on my return from the city I would have to

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hop into my car and tour the town and bay shore. I usually found him wherever there were children and I doubt if they enjoyed him as much as he enjoyed them.

The mischievous little blighter thought it more fun to play *at* them rather than with them. Toss a ball to him and he'd never bring it back, but run off and drop it in the most awkward place he could find. If he didn't do that, he would hold on to it with the grip of a bulldog and only give it up if he wanted to yawn or thought of something else. He particularly enjoyed grabbing some kid's tin pail and banging it among the rocks until he got hysterical over his own noise. Then he'd leave it there and trot back looking for more ammunition.

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I decided to try to improve his manners by teaching him to fetch and carry. Thereby he might learn to bring little girls their pails instead of villainously absconding. When down at the beach any time on our numerous outings I would pick up sticks and offer him one to bite on and get interested in, then throwing it, say to him, "Go fetch it."

The first one I threw he watched without budging, and the second without budging, and the third no budge. Three splendid poses of a dog not budging. I'll give him credit though for a little twitching. It appeared first in his right ear and then in his left; and once, in his tail. I was puzzled at first by his utter indifference to this time-honored pastime, but I



HE PARTICULARLY ENJOYED BANGING IT AMONG THE ROCKS

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finally realized it wasn't stupidity but "rugged individualism" which he had contracted in the Hoover cabinet in the kitchen. I think he had it all worked out to his own satisfaction, my conjectures to the contrary notwithstanding.

Said he to himself, "Why should I get all hot and bothered chasing his old sticks? 'Tis not what he wants at all, at all. Sure an' he's after showing me how fine he can throw. So I'll be cocking me head to the right at a short throw, to the left for a bounce, and wag me broth of a tail if he hits the water." Rookie only talks that way when he's fed on Irish stew.

Taking it by and large, I decided that fetch and carry meant to him that if I would fetch the sticks and throw them,

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he would carry on as the real audience.

Knowing that running away was an ineradicable part of his make-up and not an insult to our hospitality, we decided for his health's sake to let him have the perfect freedom of the back lot, except for twenty-five feet of rope tied with one end to a tree and the other to his harness. Until he got used to this restriction he had an acrobatic time of it and automatically became eligible for a circus life—he did so many back flops and pinwheels when the rope brought him up short.

By simple arithmetic the tree he was tied to was one foot in diameter. It took about eight trips round to get him unwound. So, not having any reverse gears in his make-up, he required a personally



HE AUTOMATICALLY BECAME ELIGIBLE FOR A CIRCUS LIFE

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conducted tour back to freedom. However, I preferred the labor to searching the neighborhood.

Before restricting him with a play rope we had thought to exercise him before dinner by placing ourselves across the lot from each other and calling him back and forth between us, one to hold him, the other to call. The very first trip to bat was a single. Joan released him and he ran delightedly for my outstretched arms, or so I thought. But when he reached me he dashed still more delightedly between my legs, hitting on all six. We found him about nine o'clock that night.

As the swarming season for ants had arrived that spring as usual, I put out those little glass pots with the green ant

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poison that was generally used in our neighborhood as a preventive.

Making allowance for Rookie's inquisitiveness, I took the precaution of hiding the pots behind stones in the flower beds at the base of the house. Then I thought no more of it until one morning about 3 a. m., when Rookie set up a howling that would have wakened the dead. So being only half dead, I went downstairs, turned on the light in his dressing room and found him with his nose stuck in a corner as though he were looking for a hole to pull in after him.

I called him. Turning his head slowly, he looked up at me with the most ashamed and woebegone expression I've ever seen outside of a child at a party trying to walk

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home backwards with nonchalance. Was he a sick pup? I ask you. He had consumed the entire contents of one of the ant poison jars. I took him over to the vet's as soon as I knew he'd be up, and told him what had happened. He gave him a thorough going over, handed him back with some pink pills and instructions; and told me he would be fit as a fiddle in a couple of days, at which I was greatly relieved. Rookie wobbled around a bit weak in the knees for a day or so, but by the end of the week he was as spry as a cricket and ready for any new kind of poison he could dig up, experience having taught him self-importance instead of self-protection.

Evidently somewhere in the dim, dark

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past of the Neolithic, or shall we say Dogdolyte Era, little dogs traveled round in bands instead of packs. I think this must be so because Rookie showed the makings of a good band leader. Whenever we turned on the phonograph he would jump up on the lounge and, standing with his forepaws on the back rest, peep over at the cabinet with a proprietary air. One assumed he had leader proclivities by his evident keenness in trying to detect a sour note. With ears cocked forward he would turn his head first to the right and then to the left as if he were afraid of missing a beat.

I had become so used to his wagging tail that at first I didn't notice it particularly when the music was on, being en-



A BIT WEAK IN THE KNEES FOR A DAY OR SO

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tertaind enough by the antics of his less intelligent end; however, his tail really drew my attention because it was wagging up and down instead of from side to side, which is the accepted vogue in the best dog circles. Yes, sir! believe it or not, his tail went up and down, up and down, then changed to right and left, like a leader's baton except that up to now I haven't seen a baton with whiskers on it.

With any reasonable tempo Rookie never missed a beat, but I will say that most any of Paul Whiteman's records had the dog licked. We seldom could play more than a couple of records at one session. The strain was too much for our sides, coupled with our fear of his losing his tail.

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Sunday was a red-letter day for Rookie. He knew he had to get dolled up in his new harness and bright green sweater. He did so much protesting about this dressing up that I put him down for a Protestant, which was safe enough—his tastes were not Catholic, not a bit.

The Sunday before Uncle Ed was due to call for him, we had him all ready for his church parade. But unfortunately some friends called for us while we were upstairs and coming in to wait, left the front door open! Rookie, new harness, green sweater, and lots of staying power—meaning power to stay away—disappeared. This time a tour of the town and our neighbors produced only disappointment. On the second day I put an ad in



HIS TAIL WENT UP AND DOWN, UP AND DOWN

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the paper, "Come home and all will be forgiven." Maybe I should have added, "Wire," he being a wire-haired terrier. Anyhow, it wouldn't have mattered, as I forgot he couldn't read.

However, some kind old dog, probably a Mastiff of Languages, must have told him about the ad, because on the fourth day Rookie came home. He stood at the bottom gate of the garden, his tail between his legs, his ears drooping, mournful-eyed and sopping wet, no harness, no sweater, no identification tag, nothing but an overmoist bundle of woe, depression, and misery.

We had been so panic-stricken at the thought of facing Uncle Ed without our sacred charge that not a vestige of reprim-

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mand was in our heads at the sight of that truant pup, but *he* didn't know that. It took us several days to get him out from under chairs and beds and remove the slink and shrink both morally and physically. Whoever had tried to detain him permanently had evidently misused him—some two-legged animal like an ex-prohibition officer, probably.

I was always fond of my Uncle Ed, but when he came that last Sunday and took away our affectionate little bundle of stupidity, I almost disliked him. Rookie relieved the tension of parting by giving us a last good, hearty laugh. Uncle Ed to this day doesn't know that what caused the merriment was his own remark when Rookie met him with wriggles of ecstasy,

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yelps of delight and oodles of attempted kisses, “Now there’s a one-man dog for you!” I wasn’t mean enough to say, “Oh, yeah? You mean one man at a time, don’t you?”

Rookie’s departure was only physical, as his busy little ghost, through the medium of our affectionate memories, paraded the house and grounds for many weeks doing all the unexpected things we had come to expect.

What I missed most of all was having him start my day for me. If Rookie woke up at 5:30, 6:30 or 7:30½, then I could bet my last buffalo nickel that Uncle Ed’s nephew woke up at 5:30½, 6:30½, or 7:31, as it only took thirty seconds flat for him to make my bedside from his

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downstairs basket. He always poked his cold little snoot into whatever hand I had exposed and gave one snuff. If I grabbed hold of his muzzle and gave it a shake, then he knew all was well and another day of ribaldry had started. And I mean started, because as a rule with one leap from the floor he would land with all fours right in the middle of my stomach and from there on it was no holds barred and the Queensberry Rules out the window.

He was rough and tough and terribly ferocious to all appearances. But not once did he ever "sink his teeth" in this morning ritual or at any other time. After about five strenuous minutes, when we were both thoroughly awakened, he would call off the play. Then he would

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make me go downstairs, not *with* him, but jolly well *after* him, to retrieve some intimate piece of Joan's such as a stocking, slipper, or a panty waist that he would grab on his way out. A very unrefined custom, but quite effective, as once downstairs, I took in the paper and milk and in their place put out the pup, a fair exchange all around.

Perish the thought that thus was ended all contact with the clown for the morning, like sending the kids to school. No indeed, to say nothing of certainly not. Fifteen minutes was a high average for him to rediscover the mysteries of his fenced-in domain, including a mad race round the yard mixed up with tail chasing, a few pauses to nibble at imaginary

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fleas and some very energetic digging at some spot where he *didn't* bury his last bone. By this time, having covered his beat, he would start taking in more territory by barking at every early riser he could see who so much as dared open a window, raise a shade, or open a door.

Impertinence such as that would be resented in the cities, but out in the country or suburbs we are used to barking dogs, crowing roosters and children's voices, and so pay them no heed.

I think Rookie was disappointed that someone didn't shy a bottle at him or roar invectives. Being a rebel, he liked an audience, hostile or friendly. Be that as it may, his barking invariably ended in a song that needed no moon for encourage-

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ment. I never heard a dog with a musical scale such as Rookie's and I never want to either.

It wasn't funny—it was gosh awful—and he knew it got results if he wanted to come in. Many times he would turn round and want to go right out again just to prove he had a good racket and liked to see it work.

About a week after Uncle Ed's arrival at his summer home up near Portland, Maine, I received a letter from him, and as it is mostly about Rookie I will be giving no family secrets away by reproducing it in full. Thus I can indicate both an ending and a beginning—the ending of my contact with a little happy hooligan and the beginning of a wee dog's paradise.

R O O K I E

Candle Isle, Me.

July 10.

My dear Nephew,

Quoting from a song of the Gay Nineties, "You are more to be pitied than censured," if Rookie's behavior is a reaction to his recent environment. If such is the case I am moved for the first time to assume the avuncular role and suggest you put your house in order, so to speak, and adopt a less riotous method of living.

When I left Rookie with you, I turned over to your care what I thought was a little gentleman. I expected at least to have him hold that status, to say nothing of a sneaking hope that some improvements could be looked for upon his return

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to my own refined but artistic atmosphere. But alas! What do I find, I ask you? No, I don't ask you, because you know damn well what I found—a swashbuckling, little half billy goat with the mind of a mischievous ring-tailed monkey. And I don't thank you for the weeks I see ahead of me trying to eradicate your corrupting influence.

On my return I found your aunt had acquired something which she explained was to be a companion for Rookie. But up to the present writing I can't agree with her classification. From the very start of his acquaintanceship with Clarice he has made her a target for his uncouth jokes and plays *at* her instead of *with* her as though she were a sawdust doll to be

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tossed aside at boredom's mere whim.

I can't say I blame him, as Clarice is quite out of his class. She is a fat little white poodle, too young as yet to have full control of her chassis, so that she teeters badly on the curves and her vest buttons slow her down on the straight-away. Rookie is fully aware of her youthful shortcomings and when he starts chasing her in circles he impatiently and inelegantly runs right over her several times in one lap, leapfrog style. If he occasionally doesn't quite clear her he uses his hind legs on Clarice's face as a sort of springboard for additional gains, with the result that poor Clarice does a cartwheel that any Jap in spangled tights would envy.

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I really must admit that I cannot credit your training (or lack of it) for this particular indignity to Clarice's face, because if it were not for her little shoe button eyes, even a grown-up would be puzzled to know whether she was approaching or departing at times.

I have never had much use for very small dogs—those in the lapdog class—for obvious reasons, one of which is that I have no lap and not even a paunch—well, practically none—for that style of dog to do his parking or have his asthma in comfort. However, there are exceptions to most rules and little Clarice has become one through her extraordinary and never-failing good nature under trying and complicated circumstances. Nev-

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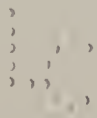
ertheless, there must be a limit to appeasement. So I shall come to her assistance and put a curb on Rookie's exuberance before he makes her a jitterpup or has her applying for an old age pension prematurely.

Fortunately, the other day during a lull in one of these Olympic try-outs I caught the young imp at a trick that was just a little too practical to come under the head of excusable humor. Having put my book down to rest my eyes a bit, I noticed that Rookie was lying dog-fashion with hind legs straight out behind him and his head on his fore-paws. He was watching something so intently that I followed his gaze to a corner of the garage where the ground is dirt-packed, and there

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was Clarice as busy as a little steam shovel, and digging a hole very obviously to bury a bone lying beside her. Nothing in that to excite particular interest—little dogs and big dogs have been burying bones since Hector was a pup and there are still no union laws against it.

Well, thinks I, for want of something better to do, I'll help Rookie watch, little knowing how different was our point of view. Clarice finished her burial service with evident satisfaction and with a scratch or two of the hind feet and a feminine wiggle where a bustle ought to be, she disappeared into the rough. Immediately thereafter Rookie arose, stretched himself, gave a fake yawn, looked around with honest dishonesty and without more



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ado stalked over to the buried bone, dug it up, trotted off and buried it behind the garage.

So highjacking had come to Candle Isle! Needless to say, I made him dig it up and after I had replaced it at the scene of the crime I rubbed his nose on the spot and gave him a spanking which he accepted with such nonchalance that I'm afraid I'll be digging up Clarice some morning.

Perhaps, my dear nephew, you think I'm laying the brush on a bit thick, but stand by. "You ain't heard nothin' yet." His crowning achievement was perpetrated this very afternoon. Your socially-minded aunt insisted that I put on a shirt, wipe the charcoal off my nose and help

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mix the cocktails for a lawn party at 4 o'clock. Well, I made the grade all right except for a little slip. I mixed the cocktails, then got the cocktails mixed, with the result that I became too playful in demonstrating the highjacking scene between Clarice and Rookie.

I buried Mrs. Hoyt-Smith's imported handbag near Clarice's bone, then called the guests around and told them I could make Rookie dig it up and by auto-suggestion make him bury it behind the garage. He dug it up very satisfactorily, but the auto part of the suggestion backfired badly. Instead of burying it behind the garage, he made off with it lickety-split for the beach half a mile away and for all I know that imported bag became an ex-

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port. If you ever get the urge to play games with ladies' handbags, pick one with a Woolworth expression. Mrs. Hoyt-Smith's cost me \$68.00. I'm afraid I've digressed from the crowning achievement I mentioned, so my best apology is to make good herewith.

Earlier in the afternoon I had purposely turned on the garden hose and left it running in a ditch at the edge of the lawn for irrigating purposes. Rookie returned from the beach, and filled with misplaced encouragement over the handbag episode, decided to change the 20-foot hose into a grand and glorious specimen of Arizona desert snake. So grabbing it well up by its hood, he trotted briskly up to the assembled guests, shaking the vile reptile



A GRAND AND GLORIOUS SPECIMEN OF ARIZONA DESERT SNAKE

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with terrific abandon and accompanying the shakes with growls of victory; at sight of its life blood being sprayed in unending jets over everybody. As the retreat was unanimous nobody thought to step on the hose or turn it off. Finally I stopped laughing long enough to reach the spigot and from that minute the life went out of the hose, AND the party! So-o-o, I've lost what little popularity I had, especially with the feminine part of our colony. Don't you ever tell your aunt, but I gave that hose a wriggle when Rookie first approached it. I hate lawn parties.

I'm mindful of what you told me of Rookie's proclivity for running away, but as Candle Isle is ten miles from the

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mainland even *his* enthusiasm will be sufficiently dampened. And I can see many industrious and happy years ahead before he will have covered all the nooks and crannies in this, his private estate by right of prospect, discovery and occasional squatting.

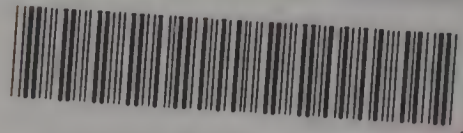
Your unregenerate but affectionate

UNCLE ED.



THE END OF HIS TALE

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