

# “Hackle”

*About a black-feathered tyrant who disturbed the peace of a division and the peace of mind of a Sergeant Major.*

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EVERY once in a while, despite stringent regulations against them, some pet animal turns up in barracks having attached itself by invisible heart-strings to a susceptible member of the Force. It will be found that these are rare specimens, usually of superior intellect, who quickly learn that a pretence of affection and a show of gay spirits is enough to insure them the comforts of home and the complete devotion of a small army of masters.

A bird, and a crow at that, would hardly seem to fit this category but “Hackle” did his level best to conform to the pattern. He was larger than run-of-the-mill crows, black as Satan’s shroud and his normal speaking voice was a hoarse rasp that could raise the hair on a dog’s back several blocks away. His shoe-button eyes shone with rare intelligence, and more often than not, with a sardonic glitter that foretold of some devilment afoot. Where he came from no one was quite sure. One day he was just there, and from that time on a certain headquarters of the Mounted Police was never quite free from the impact of his arrogant, domineering personality.

Hackle held complete sway over everyone with the exception of the Sergeant Major, whom he immediately recognized as an enemy and a threat to his very existence. Not without reason, for the Sergeant Major comforted himself with the vision of a bedraggled Hackle spitted on the point of his ceremonial sword. In the meantime he issued an order that anyone found harboring the fugitive bird in barracks, would be for it. This edict resulted in a tense game of hide-and-seek between Hackle’s friends, who were many, and the Sergeant Major who was assisted only by the long, patient arm of authority. The game was

always interesting but the end was never in doubt.

Hackle was the special charge of a constable who fitted up a shoe box for him to sleep in, arranged for his nocturnal flights by letting him in and out a window, and otherwise looked after his simple needs. This lad became an early riser only because it was the crow’s habit to greet the new day at sunrise by stabbing him awake with his formidable beak. The window would be opened and Hackle would sally forth cawing loudly to rouse the neighborhood and waken any sluggards who might still be asleep. His favorite sport and chief delight, however, was to conceal himself in the tall trees in front of headquarters and swoop down upon the staff arriving for work, grazing the head of each and courting certain destruction from the flailing arms of his victim. His strident laughter as he swept back to the safety of his perch, would rise to a shrieking crescendo that clawed at the nerve ends and set all the dogs in the neighborhood to barking in alarm.

Hackle never dared dive-bomb the Sergeant Major and he saw to it that the Sergeant Major seldom saw him except as a black shadow streaking past the barracks outward bound on some foraging mission; but the Sergeant Major couldn’t help but hear him, particularly when the window to the crow’s quarters in the barracks was shut and he was unable to get in. On these occasions, Hackle would scream his annoyance for all the world to hear and someone would rush to let him in before the Sergeant Major could lay violent hands on him.

“There’s that damn cawing again!” the Sergeant Major would shout. “Jones, can you hear it?” he would ask a luckless constable.