

The Cur and the Coyote

By EDWARD PEPLE

He was a dog, and they called him Joe. He had no godfather, but was named after Chip Moseby's one rich relative whom the brute resembled physically—and it wasn't a compliment, either.

Joe's ancestry was a matter to pass over politely and forget. He was a large animal, with the unmistakable build of the wolf-hound, yet his blood was mixed with many another hardy breed. His hair, of a dirty yellowish brown, grew in every possible way, except that designed by a beauty-loving Creator, while his undershot jaw hinted at the possibility of a bull-terrier figuring as correspondent in some long-forgotten scandal. Therefore, Joe had little claim to beauty; but, rather, as Frisco Jim expressed it, "was the dernedest orn'ries-lookin' beas' wes' of the Mississipp'."

Chip Moseby thought of his rich relative, and smiled. The criticism, harsh but just, fitted the dog in all respects with the one exception—of his eyes. There spoke the Scotch collie breed. They were beautiful, pathetic, dreamy, yet marred—from a poetical standpoint—by a dash of impishness found only in that cordially despised, but weirdly intelligent, race of canine outcasts—the cur-dog.

In the beginning Chip Moseby found him on the prairie. How he had ever wandered into the centre of this trackless plain was indeed a mystery; but there he was, and commanded pity, even from a cow-puncher. Lost and leg-sore, famished for want of food and water, he waited dumbly for the three black buzzards that wheeled in lazy circles above his head. Chip dismounted and surveyed his find in wonder, striving to decide whether to take the cur into camp or put him out of misery for once and all by a merciful shot. Wisdom called aloud for the shot, but something—a half-remembered something deep down in the inside of the man—whispered and made him hesitate.

No, he could not decide; but, being a gambler by birth, taste, and education, he shifted the burden of responsibility to the back of Chance. The process was simple. He reached for the heavy gun which lay upon his hip, and poised a silver dollar between the thumb and finger of his other hand.

"Now, stranger," he observed cheerfully, "you're goin' to be the stakes of a show-down. Heads, you go to camp. Tails, you go to hell. You couldn't ask for anything fairer'n that, could you?"

He spun the coin and caught it in his open palm. The dog cocked his ears, and the Texan cocked his forty-four. Tails lay uppermost.

"Yo' luck ain't changed much, puppy," sighed the man, shifting his position for a cleaner shot at the back of the sick dog's head. "You've been elected this time, sure, an'—"

Chip paused suddenly, wondering why, but pausing. His victim whined faintly, raised a pair of gentle, fever-touched collie eyes, and waited. The cow-puncher eased the hammer of his gun and slid the weapon into its holster.

"Dern the dawg!" he muttered beneath his breath. "It's jus' like some po' li'l' helpless, moon-eyed gal what's—what's callin' me a sneak!"

Chip Moseby did not know he was muttering sentiment; but, alone on a wide green prairie with his pony and a dog, where none of his fellow rangers could see and laugh at him—well, it made no difference, anyway. From his saddle-tail he untied his water-flask, pouring its contents into his wide felt hat; then he added a bit of liquid from another and more precious flask, and made an offering to a new-found friend. The dog lapped it eagerly, and, after a time, sat up on his haunches, to devour the last crumb and fiber of Chip's last ration of corn bread and bacon, while the cow-man looked on and cursed him—horribly—but with a smile.

Slipping, sliding, in the dip of his master's saddle, yet wagging a mangy tail to show that he understood, Joe was christened and rode twenty miles to camp. It was just an ordinary camp of twenty cow-men in charge of eighteen

hundred long-horns "on the graze." An idle existence at this season, moving as the big "bunch" listed, and dealing greasy cards at all times save when in the saddle or snoring beneath the cold white stars. The cow-men lived, drank bad whisky, gambled, and died—sometimes from delirium tremens or snake-bite; at other times from purely natural causes, such as being trampled by a steer. A remnant they were of a long-departed hero type, still picturesque, yet lacking in certain vital attributes—mainly morality and a bath.

II

The camp accepted Joe for two reasons: firstly, because they did not care one way or the other; secondly, because Chip Moseby had, on various occasions, thrashed three of the cow-men in brutal, bare-knuckled fights—and the rest had seen him do it. Therefore, nineteen more or less valuable criticisms were politely withheld.

For four sweet days Joe ate, drank, and slumbered, recovering both in body and in nerve; then he rose up and began to

when the cattle-camp lay slumbering through the night, Joe's dog heart ached and troubled him. It is a hopeless sort of thing to stand a bullying for the sake of etiquette, but somewhere thru the mongrel's many breeds ran the blood of a gentleman dog; so Joe gave up his bones and took his bites without a growl.

"Him dern coward!" tittered Greaser Sam, pointing at the cur contemptuously with his soup-spoon. "Tha's founy. Big dog—no fight."

"How much d'ye think so?" inquired Chip Moseby, puffing at his corn-cob leisurely.

"Fi' dollar!" chirped the Mexican cook, his little rat eyes twinkling.

"Make it ten," said Chip, with a careless shrug, "an' Joe'll chase that rabbit's whelp of yo'r'n plumb off'n the range."

Greaser Sam laughed joyfully and produced a month's pay in silver and dirty notes. Yank Collins was made stakeholder, while Chip, stone deaf to the warnings of certain unbelievers, knocked the dottle from his pipe and whistled to his dog. Joe came over—for protection, it seemed—and laid a

testants for camp prestige, and wagered on the outcome. The battle, minus revolting details, was soon over and all bets paid, for—briefly—Joe did his best. Only an angel or a ring-seasoned bull-terrier could have done more. Greaser Sam lost twenty dollars. Chip Moseby won ninety. Tonque, the bully, yelping in the dim distance, lost all of his pride, the better portion of one ear, and quite a depressing quantity of hide and hair.

Joe barked once, a hoarse shout of unholy joy—which was only human, after all—then sat down modestly, licked his wounds, and counted up the cost of his victory. He had made one enemy, and many friends; but Greaser Sam was only a cook, anyway—so the sting of a dozen ragged bites was peace unutterable.

Later, Sam partially squared the account by pouring a dipper full of boiling grease on Joe's back. Thus, by the time ten inches of hide curled up, peeled off, and healed again, the cur-dog loathed all breeds of Mexicans, and one in particular. Also, Joe suffered somewhat in the matter of scraps and bones; then affairs took a turn for the better. Greaser Sam, while revelling in a noontide siesta, inadvertently rolled on a rattlesnake, and, in spite of a copious supply of antidote on hand, swelled up absurdly, made noises, and passed out in hideous agony.

At the unpretentious funeral Joe controlled his features admirably, with the one exception of his tail, which would wag itself in spite of every gentlemanly instinct. This was wrong, of course, but a dog's ideas on the ethics of retribution are simple and direct. Joe was glad—very glad. He thrashed poor Tonque again—not from malice, but merely in a spirit of exuberance. One of his ancestors had been an Irish setter, though Joe was unaware of it.

III

And now the waif began to find his own. He learned the profession of cow-punching, together with the arts and observances thereof. He could aid in a round-up nobly, for his wolf-hound length of limb gave him speed, which made even the tough little broncos envious. At branding-time he could dive into the herd and "cut out" any calf desired, then hold the evil-minded mother en tete-a-tete till the irons did their work. This saved the cow-men much exertion, but was hard on the cattle, and harder still, as it proved, on Joe.

His deeds were praised just a fraction too highly, so the cur-dog lost his head, puffed up with pride, and grew "sassy"—an elusive state to which even humans are subject. It was borne in upon Joe that he owned the camp, the bucking broncos, the grazing long-horns, and, yea, even the prairie itself for a most expansive sweep, and life seemed good to him.

"Say, Chip," remarked Frisco Jim, with befitting solemnity, "thet there dawg o' yo'r'n is gittin' jes' too cocky fer to live a minute. He don't need nothin' but a straw hat, 'n' a toothpick shoved in his face, to put me in min' o' thet li'l' English maverick what herded with us las' August. You reck'lect 'im, Chip—one eye-glass 'n' a hired man fer to tote his shotgun!"

Few cow-men, however, are troubled because of a cur-dog's vanity; therefore, they submitted to his patronizing familiarity and rebuked him not. They loved him for his grit, his speed, his brains. They flattered him and spoiled him, sharing, on common terms, their board and bed—especially the bed composed of a rolled-up blanket with Joe on the outside. Of course, there were fleas—hundreds of fleas—but a hero of the plains soon learns to overlook the little things of life; besides, it was good to feel a warm dog in the small of a fellow's back when the wind was nippy and from the North. Thus Joe waxed fat and prospered in his pride.

It is strange how a mongrel's breeds will crop out singly, and, for the time being, dominate all other traits; yet this was the case with Joe. In a fight of any kind his bull-Irish came to the fore

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OUR WESTERN EVENINGS

By GERALD J. LIVELY

Our Spring-time evenin's but a color scheme

Of shaded watery blues and pearly greys;

The new-born earth is stirring with movements of new life,

—And a brand new Sun floats down on living haze,

The hush of new creations holds the prairie in a spell,

The crocus' close their little purple stars;

Like finger-posts of promise, from behind the carded clouds,

Soft light-rays score the sky with luculent bars.

Our Summer evenin's but a blot of gold,

Just splashed across the canvas of the skies;

A thunder cloud goes trailing 'cross the southern distances,

Its lingering lightning flickers out and dies;

The smudge's smoke is hanging like a halo round each farm,

Enmeshing like a net the fading light,

While in the velvet shadows, with needles made of gold,

The fireflies sew the falling robes of night.

Our Autumn evenin's amber lines,

And streaks of opal daubed across the sky,

And clouds like purple mammoths, their bellies bulged wi' gold,

And some like souls o' roses driftin' by;

The yellow moon has risen, just a little north o' east,

The sun has sunk away down south o' west;

The stubble-fields look tired, and the summer grass is dead,

The whole wide prairie's settlin' down to rest.

Our Winter evenin's but a wraith,

The pallid wraith of long gone Summer days,

Accompanied by sun-dogs, and clouds o' diamond dust,

And powdered o'er wi' dust o' violets haze;

The burnt-out sun is diving away down in the south,

And throws across the sky his gelid glow;

Little whispering ghosts of Zero chase their shadows through each bluff

Ere they cast themselves, plum-dark, across the snow.

take notice. The first thing he noticed was a lean-flanked, powerful dog that had dwelt in camp for the space of seven months and felt at home. The "homer's" name was Tonque. He belonged to a gentleman known familiarly as Greaser Sam, a gentleman whose breeds were as badly mixed as Joe's—a fact to which pointed reference was made by jovial friends with frequency and impunity.

Tonque was the only member in camp who openly resented Joe's advent. He first made pantomimic overtures, then displayed a spleenish disappointment at the stranger's gender and disposition. He bullied the new dog shamefully, took away the juiciest bones, nipped him in his tenderest spots, and cursed him in Mexican dog-language, a thing conceded by all linguists to be—with the exception of coyote talk—the vilest of obscene vituperation. Joe bore in silence for many days. He was a guest of Mr. Moseby, virtually a tenderfoot, and uncertain of the etiquette required in his delicate position. The master gave no orders, and what was the dog to do? True, a bite or two was nothing much, but an insult sinks far deeper than a tooth, and

trembling chin on the master's knee.

"Joe, old man," asked Chip, in the tone of a mother's tender solicitude, "is that there Mexican skunk a pesterin' of you?"

The dog, of course, said nothing—that is, verbally—but his two great, glorious eyes spoke volumes. In them the master read this earnest but respectful plea:

"Mr. Moseby, sir, if you will only say the word and allow me to chew up that bow-legged son of a one-eyed pariah, I'll love you till the crack of doom!"

The master, who was a gentleman fighter himself, smiled grimly, stroked the ugly head, and waved his pipe-stem in the general direction of the bumptious Tonque.

"All right, son, go eat him up!"

It may here be stated that one of Joe's grandest qualities lay in strict obedience; or, failing in the letter of command, he did his best.

The incident occurred just after dinner, when the cow-punchers, replete with coffee and fried bacon, were enjoying a quiet smoke. They rose to a man, formed a whooping ring about the con-