

was full—and yet, not quite, for another trouble was to come upon him. His master went away.

Chip Moseby had gone in the night—on a hurry call—while the dog was stalking a certain coyote many miles from camp. Of course there might have been a trail, but a heavy rain was falling, which is bad for trails; and when a man in the West simply goes away—well—none but fools, or sheriffs, follow after.

And now was Joe alone indeed. For a time even the coyote was forgotten in a grief for the one square man who had offered pats, low-spoken words, and a sympathetic eye. Shame and bitterness, for a dog, are hard to bear; but grief for a loved one whisked into the Great Unknown is a pang undreamed of man. It rends him, while his dog heart slowly breaks and he, too, slips away, to hunt—who knows?—till he licks a master's spirit-hand.

The Mexican dog, Tonque, was lapsing into arrogance of late. Joe thrashed him soundly, but got no pleasure out of it, thus proving to himself that his case was bad. Then he wandered away on the prairie alone, and made a find. It wasn't much in itself—a calfskin tobacco-pouch—but it belonged to Chip Moseby. Joe nosed it once, and hope came trickling back to him. And now the collie stock cropped out again, assisted by that other and much maligned canine strain—the cur. Joe noted the distant camp, drew an imaginary line between it and his find, and knew that the master's bronco had traveled north.

This was enough. The ugly ears lay back, the long limbs stretched themselves in a swinging stride. Straight as a shaft toward the pole star sped the faithful dog, while his heart beat high with a bounding, hungering joy. Somewhere in the north his master waited, and behind him lay the camp, the jeering cow-men, and a gang of mad coyotes yapping at the stars.

Then, suddenly, Joe stopped—so suddenly that he slid. For a long, long time he sat motionless upon his haunches; but at last he arose, looked northward with one wistful glance, and then trotted back to camp.

Now this, in a human, might be called heroic courage, or even majestic pride. In a cur, it has no name; but a brazen hell-warbler was still at large—and the cur remembered it.

VI

The next time Joe gave Tonque a thrashing, he did enjoy it—to the very marrow; also, he ate a square meal, and began to study the habits of coyotes from a scientific standpoint.

"Say, Joe," said Frisco Jim, with his greasy smile, "why don't you put some salt on yo' cousin's tail?"

Joe passed the jest and insult without apparent notice, for now he had other fish to fry. To be explicit, he went out and lay down among the long-horns, hoping the fumes of their smoking bodies might disguise his scent. If Mr. Coyote chanced to wander carelessly among the cattle, as he did at times, then—perhaps! But Mr. Coyote laughed, as one decides a tenderfoot, and bored a hole in the wind with his shambling lope.

This was disappointing, at least from the dog's side of it, but the next encounter proved to be of greater interest to all concerned, and these were many. Joe made a wide detour, assailed the enemy in his rear, and got him pocketed in a bunch of sleeping cattle. This was well. The coyote's only road to hope lay directly across the backs of several hundred steers; a perilous path, at best, for the beasts rose up in unexpected places, thus causing the racetrack to become lumpy and uncertain. The long-horns are peaceful creatures as a rule; but think, my friend! If you yourself were awakened suddenly from dreams of euds and luscious grass by a charging coyote and a whimpering, foaming dog, perhaps you would think from a bovine point of view. At any rate, the cattle made progress difficult and uncertain, and once the race was all but run. A big steer tossed the coyote fifteen or twenty feet, but another one tossed Joe at the same instant, so honors were even, so to speak.

And now, indeed, was pandemonium loosed upon the night. The terror-stricken cattle, fleeing from they knew not what, surged backward, bellowing; in frenzy, rushing round and round in a swiftly converging circle, tightening into a sort of whirlpool knot, known technically upon the plains as a "cattle mill." In daylight a "mill" is dreaded. At night—well, ask the cow-men.

"Wake up, boys!" screamed Denver Ed, seeking his tethered bronco on the run. "Joe's millin' the meat fer to ketch his ki-yote!"

Now, whether or not it was really Joe's design, is a matter beyond the ken of man; but this we know, ere sweet tranquility was restored again, the cow-punchers had expended their uttermost supply of plainmen's three P's, which is to say—powder, perspiration, and profanity. Yet peace and order did arrive at last, and when it came, a little black dot was yapping on the far horizon while Joe sneaked, panting, into camp, defeated again, but hopeful. The gods had almost smiled upon him, yet with the cow-men he wasn't quite so popular.

Twice more the cur-dog failed—failed by a narrow margin, tho—and the days slipped one by one away. Each day was a brooding time for the memories of wrongs and ridicule, a yearning time for the loved one waiting in the north. Each night the coyote took the sage-brush at a flying leap, and stabbed the stillness with his hideous, ghoully cry.

One day Joe lay thinking—hard. Suddenly he cocked his ears, took a short stroll on the prairie and came back satisfied; then he waited many days for chance and a cold, propitious wind. It came—an icy whistler—tearing from out the east till the broncos backed their tails against it; while the men blasphemed and built a bigger fire. At twilight Joe stole out beside a clump of sage-brush, scratching till he made a hole. In this he squatted, his black nose pointing dead toward the blast, the seven senses of his every breed alert for trouble.

Again came night, but without the lazy moon. Again came silence, save for the moaning of the wind; the wind and one other wail—a faint yap! yap! that dribbled from out the east. A horrid note, a very caricature of sound, yet music now to the ears of the waiting dog! Nearer it came, and nearer still; no longer an echo down the wind, but a full, deep-throated challenge, mingled with the pattering of velvet feet. It came, a rush—a swish—the shadow of a ghost-beast sailing over the sage-brush in a beautiful, unsuspecting leap.

'Twas a perfect leap, high, graceful, grand; but it had its disadvantages. In mid air the coyote saw his fate beneath him, and tried to turn. He did turn, partially, and lit upon his back. In an instant Joe was all over him.

Of the bliss and sublime brutality of that battle in the dark, none save Joe alone will ever know. But, oh, the glory of it! The feel of a scuffling enemy beneath his paws, when teeth met flesh and bone, to lock with a rasping click! The savage joy of a foe man fighting back at last, frothing, tearing, in a coward's fury of despair. The peace which passeth understanding when the quivering brute lay dead!

Joe closed his eyes and rested. His throat-grip was still upon his prey, a grip which relaxed not once till the coyote's body was dragged across the plain, till it lay beside the camp-fire, bloody, limp, and still.

"He's got 'im!" roared a wondering sentinel, and the camp woke up and cheered.

They formed a ring about the victor and applauded him, but he backed away and snarled. He hadn't asked applause. He wanted justice—justice for a dog.

The cow-men looked and marveled. A dozen hands reached out to pat the ugly head, for human beasts can honor courage, even in a lesser beast; but the cur remembered many things. The black nose wrinkled wickedly; the coarse hair bristled down his spine; he barked—one curse of anger and contempt—then turned and left the camp.

In vain they whistled after him; in vain they shouted and called his name. Their voices were lost in the rush of icy wind, and the dog was gone.

Not once did Joe look back. He settled down into a tireless, swinging trot—measured, monotonous—but having for its goal a loved one waiting somewhere in the trackless North. His soul was satisfied; his dog heart beat with the peaceful pride of one who has wiped a stain away. There was blood upon his coat—the blood of an enemy—and Joe could look his master in the face.

The labor unrest of our time is due not merely to the ill-adjustment of goods and materials, but to the crushing and warping of the personalities of the great part of the population, owing to the conditions under which they live.—Rev. W. Temple



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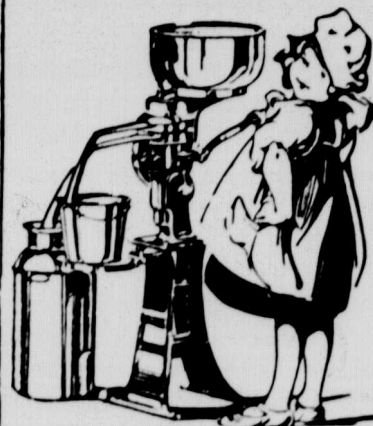
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