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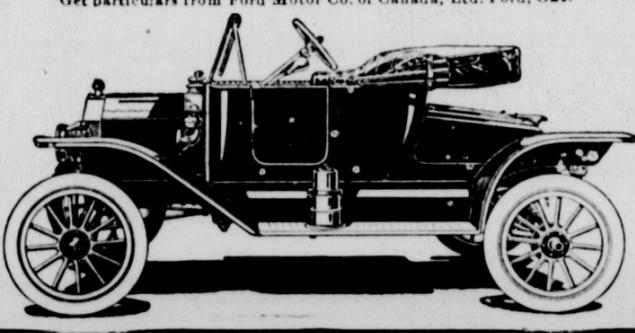


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hero fallen low, then the cur saw red and forgot to be a gentleman.

At best a rawhide boot is a rather tough proposition, but Joe bit thru it, thru the trousers beneath, thru flesh and sinew, till his strong teeth met. With a bellow of rage and pain, the humorist wrenched away and reached for his big blue gun. He was a quick man, but Chip Moseby was a fraction quicker. His hand flew out and disturbed the pot-shot aim, while the bullet went whining out across the prairie, impairing the market value of an innocent long-horn.

"Drop it!" commanded Chip, then added, by way of pacifying argument: "If you had made a screamin' ass of yo's 'I like Joe had, an' we'd 'a' laughed at you, turn me ef you wouldn't want to cut our throats!"

This was logic, but Sprig, in his misery, failed to see it. He, too, was Irish. His fingers tingled on his smoking gun, while he urged his death-claim with a quivering chin.

"Th' murtherin' devil's whelp! He's chewed a piece out'er me laig."

Chip Moseby retorted promptly and heartlessly.

"Well, charge the so' place up to profit 'n' loss, 'n' run 'n' tell yer mommer. Now shet up, or I'll bloody yer dern nose."

This also was logic; besides, Sprig's nose had been bloodied once before, and memory lingered. Therefore, he dropped the discussion in a Christian spirit, tied up his leg with a whiskey-soaked rag, and strove to forget the incident.

V

So much for the man's wound. The dog had received a deeper one—larger and more pitiless. A bull's-eye had been made of his vanity, and only death or the coyote's blood could soothe the pain away.

Next morning he tried to persuade himself that it all had been a dream; but Sprig Flannigan limped, and a dog's heart doesn't ache so fiercely because of dreams. The day dragged on and on, but reached a close at last. A purple twilight came sneaking over the west, deeper, darker, till the lazy moon arose, and again the camp-fire paled—a lonely, flickering blotch on a vast white sea. And silence fell—God's silence, which a whisper mars like a curse on a woman's lips.

From out the east a whisper leaked—a faint yap! yap! that rose and sank again. Joe heard it, and strove to give no sign, but his hair would rise, and his lips rolled back from his yellow fangs. Silence again, more holy than before; then a ghost-beast leaped the sage-brush, squatted and profaned the night with a shattered, driveling howl.

"Hi, Joe!" said a merry-hearted gentleman, "there's yer frien' a calling of you. Run along, son, 'n' play with him."

This sally was received with a shout of mirth, and the dog arose and went; not toward the cause of his degradation, but deep into the silent cattle-herd, where his soul—if dogs have souls—was empty of all save hate and shame alone.

The nights which followed were, to Joe, a living death. With fateful punctuality the hell-warbler jumped the sage-brush and began his haunting serenade. He jeered at Joe, and drove him to the verge of hydrophobia. He called the dog by names unbearable, and dared him to a chase. Joe did try it once, just to prove the paradox to his canine mind. Thereafter he resorted to strategy, and laid for Mr. Coyote, but without avail.

This seemed to amuse the cow-men vastly, and each sad failure was a new delight to them. Somehow, they fancied the two words "humor" and "brutality" to be synonymous, and wrought religiously upon that line. They took to tormenting Joe instead of watching his old-time parlor tricks, which now, alas! were played no more. He had no heart for tricks, and even the ace and deuce-spot seemed to have lost their charm. The dog grew thin and hollow-eyed, moaning and battling in his sleep, when false dreams gave his enemy into his jaws.

Then the hell-warbler took to calling in the daytime, bringing his friends and family with him. He would glide into camp and steal something, then glide away unharmed, pursued by raw profanity and a pistol-ball. Joe loathed him, but was ashamed. No longer he waited for the cow-men's nightly jests, but at the sound of the first yap! yap! he would rise from the camp-fire and slink away into the outer darkness, to hide his face from the sight of man. Joe's cup of woe

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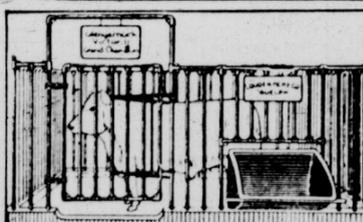
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