



Children's Stories That Never Grow Old

RAB
AND HIS FRIENDS

BOB and I were leaving school, our heads together and our arms around each other as only boys know how, when, at the top of the street, we saw a crowd. "A dog fight!" shouted Bob, and off we flew, hoping it might not be over before we got there. We found the crowd around two dogs fighting, one a small white bull terrier, who was busy throttling a large shepherd dog, who knew more about tending sheep than fighting bulldogs. They were hard at it, the little dog doing good work with his sharp teeth on the shepherd dog's thick neck. "Game Chicken," as Bob called the bulldog, was working his way up for a final grip on the poor collie's throat, while everybody was shouting "How shall we stop them?" "Water," cried some; but there was none near.



"**B**ITE the tail," another cried, and an old man got down on his knees and bit the collie's tail with all his might. But the collie's master knocked the old man down for his pains.

Game Chicken held on still like death.

"Snuff, a pinch of snuff!" shouted a gaily dressed young man. At this an old man in the crowd put a pinch of snuff on Chicken's nose. Chicken sneezed, and the collie was free, and up the street he flew.

But Chicken's blood was up, and down the street he bounded, Bob, myself and the crowd after him.

Trotting down the middle of the street was a huge, old and gray mastiff as big as a little bull. Chicken made straight at him, and fastened his teeth on his throat.



THE great mastiff stood still, held himself up and roared a long, terrible roar, just as Bob and I came up to him. The mastiff opened his mouth as far as a strong muzzle would let him, his lips curled up in rage, showing his white teeth; but the straps across his mouth were tight and held him fast. The crowd was soon around them, while Chicken held on.

"A knife," cried Bob. An old cobbler handed me his knife, and I put it under the edge of the leather muzzle. Then one sudden jerk of that big head, and brave Chicken dropped limp. The mastiff had taken him by the small of his back like a rat. He looked down at his little victim, sniffed him all over, and then turned and trotted off up the street, as if nothing had happened, Bob and I after him.



HE TURNED up an alley and stopped at a stable-yard. There was a carrier's cart ready to start, and by it a thin, little man, with his hand at the gray horse's head, looking angrily about for something, and we knew that that something was the mastiff, his dog.

"You thief!" said he, kicking at Rab. Rab avoided the heavy shoe and ran under the cart, his ears down and what little he had of tail down, too. His master saw the muzzle hanging cut and useless from Rab's neck. We told him what Rab had done, and that we had cut the muzzle. The little man said to the dog: "Rab, my man; poor Rabbie," whereupon the stump of a tail rose up, the torn and ragged ears stood up straight and the eyes filled. Rab was comforted, for Rab's master and he were friends again. A stroke of the whip, and Jess, the old gray horse, Rab and his master went off together.

SIX years passed; a long time for a dog and a boy. Bob was off to the wars and I was a medical student. I saw Rab almost every week, and we were fast friends. I found the way to his heart by scratching his big head and giving him a bone every now and again. If I did not notice him he would plant himself straight before me and stand wagging his spud of a tail, looking up, with his big head turned a little to one side.

One day Rab walked in the open gate of the hospital with that great, easy saunter of his. He looked as if he owned the place. After him came Jess, with her cart, and in it sat a sweet-faced woman. The carrier, who was leading the horse, when he saw me, said:

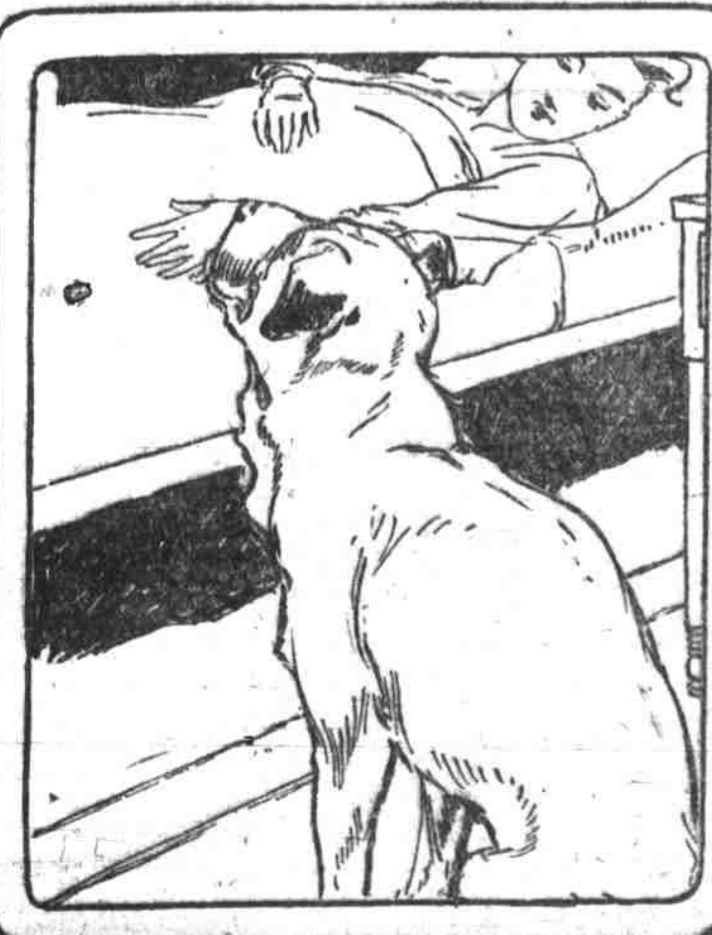
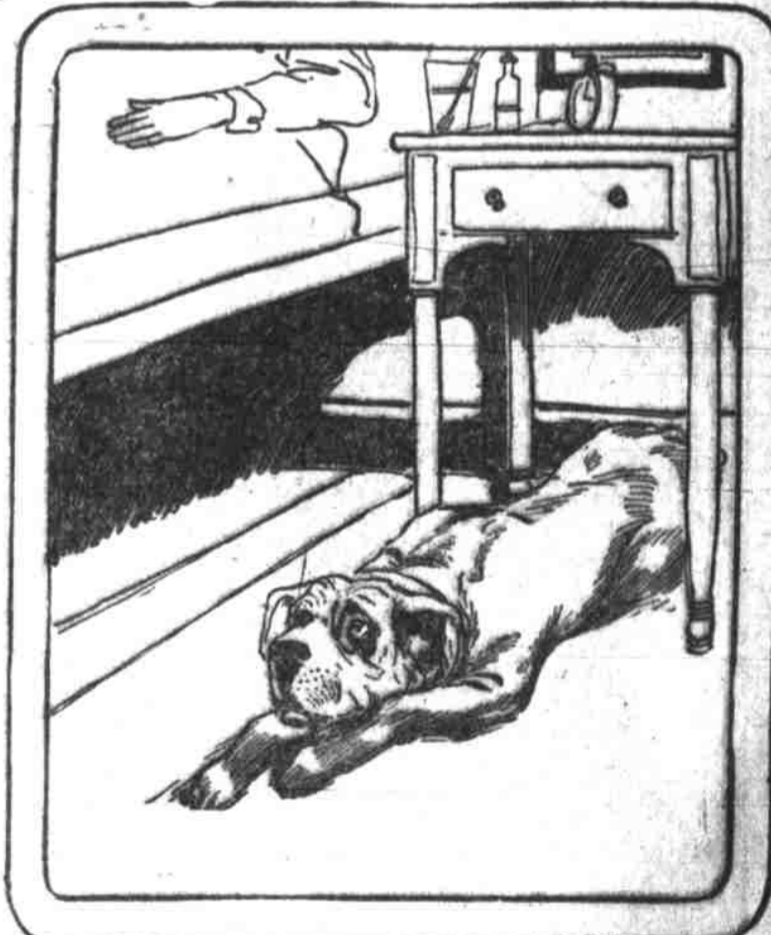


"**M**ASTER JOHN, this is the mistress; she is sick, and we want you to cure her."

Rab looked on very much puzzled, but ready to fight any one, nurse, the porter, or even me, to protect his mistress.

I took them into the hospital, and Rab came, too. I wish you could have seen him; he would have made you laugh. Rab was a queer-looking old fellow, with his lion-like hair, short and hard; his big bull-like body and large, blunt head, covered with scars, one eye out and one ear torn off. But the one eye he had could see better than any other dog's two eyes. His tail was nothing but a spud, half as long as your finger, and it kept moving to and fro all the time.

Rab was not quite happy in the hospital. He seemed worried, and the only ear he had was up and down all the time.



I THINK he felt that something was wrong with his mistress, and he stood guard by her bed like a soldier. It was wonderful the way that dog looked at me, as much as to say: "May I stay here with my mistress?" I said: "Yes, Rab, you may stay, if you behave yourself." And he did behave very well, never moving a muscle and showing us how meek and gentle he could be. Every day while they stayed at the hospital Rab took a walk to the alley; but he never fought during these days that his mistress was ill. He always came back to the door of his mistress' room, and would wait outside quietly until some one would let him in. Then he would crawl under the table and watch with his one eye, wagging his tail if his mistress moved. All night and all day he followed with his ever-moving eye every action of the nurse and doctor.

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ONLY one day did Rab leave his place under the table. Then he walked slowly over to her bedside and licked his mistress' hand, which lay uncovered on the bed, and then he went back to his place under the table.

Not long after this his master spoke to Rab, and pointed to the bottom of the bed. Rab jumped to the foot of the bed, to my surprise, and sat there awaiting his master's orders. The carrier left the room to go for Jess and her cart. The time had come for them to go home. When he came back, Rab got down, and, after the carrier had wrapped his wife in the blankets, he took her in his arms and left the hospital, followed by Rab.

The last I saw of them the carrier was leading Jess by the head, his wife in the cart, and faithful Rab trotting in the rear.