

# SOME DOGS I HAVE KNOWN

BY W. A. S. DOUGLAS

I RAN into the inside tip on this story when I was news editor of the *Houston Post*, down Texas way. At the start it had looked like a run-of-the-mine accident with a slight overtone of malicious intent. A man in Goose Creek, about 30 miles away, had been shot and killed while coming home from a saloon. The killer had been caught and had declared that he had been engaged to remove the man's dog by the dead man's wife, who considered the animal a nuisance. It seemed strange that a hired assassin would mistake a man for a dog so we made some inquiries and developed an extraordinary story, even for Texas, where you run into more bizarre stories than in any other state in the union.

Luckily, in case any of my clients should doubt the facts as presented here, I have corroboration in the person of Harold Taylor, at present an editorial writer on the *Wall Street Journal*, who happened to be the reporter I dispatched to Goose Creek to probe into the matter. Mr. Taylor did an excellent job — so good that we lost him to the Fort Worth *Star-*

*Telegram*, which gave him the raise I failed to secure for him.

We'll call the murdered man — for it turned out that in truth he was deliberately murdered — by the name of Mullarkey, which is not a bad name when you think it over. This Mullarkey's dog was a big brindle greyhound; not one of your little whippets that you see on the dog courses, but an animal which, when it stood on its hind feet, was as tall as the average man. Mullarkey had brought him up from a pup and had taught him some very strange tricks.

When the man himself was sober there was not, apparently, a better-behaved person around Goose Creek; and the dog, during these too-infrequent periods, was quiet and inoffensive, tagging along dutifully at his master's heels.

But when Mullarkey went on his regular weekend binge all Goose Creek and the country folks got upset. Long before the greyhound — which he called Corn, after a favorite Texas beverage — was born, this Mullarkey had a habit, when liquored, of cavorting around bars and other public

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places on his hands and knees, barking and yowling, pretending he was a hound. He'd sniff at sober folks' ankles and make as if to climb up on them and lick their faces. Even after he got his teeth kicked in it made no difference; he got false ones and carried on.

From a pup he started training that greyhound to act like a man. First off he had him walking on his hind legs and developed him so he could go along that way from the farm to the saloon belt and back again at night. After that Mullarkey, who must after all have been as much of a devil drunk as sober, took to running behind Corn and acting like he was the dog and the greyhound was human. Things went along so it came that sometime about the middle of the regular Saturday night festivities in Goose Creek, Mullarkey and the dog would edge into some joint — after getting good and oiled somewhere else — and start plaguing folks. Mullarkey would order a beer standing up — and it was Goose Creek ethics that if you were able to stand you got served whether welcome or not.

Then, with the beer on the bar, the greyhound would come up, put his front feet on the mahogany and start drinking while Mullarkey, with a bottle of corn on his hip, would go down on his hands and knees and bark and yowl. They'd keep this up in a dozen or so places till Mullarkey wasn't able to stand — and therefore could be refused — and the dog would

be staggering around. Out they would both go and start for home, the dog on its hind legs in the middle of the road trying to sing and Mullarkey bouncing around in the ditch alongside, barking his head off. When they'd get to the farmhouse Corn would walk inside, climb into Mullarkey's bed and go to sleep; the Mullarkeys were prosperous folks and had twin beds. And Mullarkey would make the rest of the night hideous in the front yard baying at the moon or passing cars.

As Mr. Taylor intimated in the stories he sent from the courtroom, you couldn't blame Mrs. Mullarkey. She had deliberately hired this gunman to kill her husband, the both of them concluding that the story of mixing the man and the dog would be accepted. They signed confessions but, in view of the defense testimony of the neighbors and the entire membership of the Goose Creek local of the Bartenders' Union, they got off with a year apiece. Corn was destroyed.

## II

Zeke Sludge was a fairly well-to-do farmer with some good land just a little way outside of Hot Coffee, Miss. In his younger days he had been a fairly successful minor politician, amassing a competence sufficient to make him a landowner through faithfully sticking to a short and original campaign platform. He promised his constituents always to be "as honest as the times would permit."

When Zeke's son, Henry, grad-

uated *cum laude* from Hot Coffee High School the old man asked him whether he wanted to pursue learning further or settle down on the farm. Henry said he would like to go to the state university and his dad accommodated him. But Zeke was tight in certain ways and while he paid for Henry's board and his tuition he limited his pocket money to a rather measly one dollar a week.

This parsimony left Henry pretty well out of things in the fun line. But he had inherited the sagacity which made his dad a prosperous politician; there was, he knew, one mode of approach to his father's pocketbook and that was by way of the old man's hound dog, Spot. Zeke Sludge could be tight with his wife and his son, but if Spot could only have talked he could have had about anything he asked for. He was a smart dog, going on about eight years old when Henry first lit out for the university; he could tap off numbers with his foot, bark yes or no, shake hands and tell Zeke's political friends from his foes. Wherever the old man went Spot went — and the old man went to some queer places.

Henry came home for his first summer vacation and was met by Zeke and Spot at Mount Olive, about twenty miles from Hot Coffee, which is not on the railroad. And as they jogged along home Zeke asked Henry how his learning was coming.

"They got men there," said Henry, "who have brought learning to something more than a science. Do you

know, Pop, they got classes in languages for dogs?"

"No!" yelled the old man.

"Sure do," said Henry. "There's one old wolfhound up there got through with his English and is a polished talker. Now he's took up French."

"Gosh-a-mighty," breathed Zeke. "Think they could do anything with Spot there?"

"Well, they might," said Henry.

All that summer vacation old Zeke kept harping about Spot's education and how he would make a monkey out of that wolfhound once he got to the university. A week after school opened Henry wrote back that English, French and Spanish tuition fees for Spot would be \$500. The old man had insisted that his dog take one more language than the wolfhound. So Zeke sent Spot up to school and mailed a check for the \$500.

In Mississippi you don't take much heed about tomorrow, so Henry cashed that check and gave Spot away to one of the Negro janitors. With the tuition money he built himself into the most popular sophomore in the school and it was only when the Christmas holidays loomed up that he had time to think about Spot — and the spot he was in.

At Mount Olive old Zeke was there with the buggy to meet the train.

"Where's Spot, Son?" he asked.

"I'll tell you about Spot, Pop," said Henry, looking right sad, "as soon as we get out a-ways."

They drove along till they were well outside of Mount Olive and Zeke said: "What about Spot?"

"Well," said Henry, "there was the smartest dog ever went to the university. The way he could throw around English and French and Spanish! He made a monkey out of every other dog on the campus."

"Yes," said the old man, "and where is he?"

"Spot come on the train with me," answered Henry, "all the way till about twenty miles above Mount Olive. We were talking about meeting you and all of a sudden Spot gets to talking about old times with you. He was telling me about three days and nights you and he spent in Memphis and what he said made me right mad, Pop. And then he got onto another story about you and him in Jackson."

"Kind of loosemouthed, was he?" old Zeke put in.

"Far too loosemouthed," said Henry. "And lying, too. Lying something awful. I got that mad I just jerked out my knife, stuck it in his gizzard and threw him through the train window."

Zeke and his son drove along for a mile or so in silence and then the old man spoke.

"Henry, you're sure you killed that lyn' hound dead?"

"Sure did, Pop," answered Henry.

### III

I have a friend, an old soldier from the First World War, who believes he carries the woes of all humanity on his

shoulders. These shoulders are narrow, he is far from being a strong man either mentally or physically, and he is quite the gentlest soul I know. But he goes off on crusades of all sorts and when he finds he has failed, as is always the case, he gets onto a bender which lasts for days, sometimes for months.

He is so kind and sympathetic that folks of his acquaintance, and even complete strangers, make a practice of carrying their troubles to him. These troubles are in great proportion purely imaginary but that makes no difference to my friend. He believes all he hears, shoulders each load as his own and finishes up, inevitably, in the alcoholic ward.

A few years since, he ran into a particularly nasty siege, owing to his great affection for dogs. He had strolled into a saloon for a harmless glass of beer, and there encountered a newspaperman, whom we will call Mr. Smith. This newspaperman's reputation as a liar is something both gaudy and pretentious, but my friend's faith in human nature is such that he will accept any tale.

Mr. Smith, roaring drunk, insisted that the gentle soul have something. My friend took another beer and asked the reason for the current bender. He was informed that sorrows were being drowned instead of joys being celebrated.

Mr. Smith, wiping away a tear, announced that his dog had walked out on him.

"I can't imagine you being cruel to

a dumb animal," said my friend. "How come?"

"It's this way," explained Mr. Smith gulping down a whiskey. "I found this dog in France during the war. [He meant the first disturbance.] He's a German police dog and a mighty intelligent animal, even though he is getting right old. He has hurt me to the quick, old pal."

"That's too bad, too bad," said my friend. "I've been on the wagon, so to speak, for six months. It hurts me, too. Give me a drink, Joe."

Mr. Smith insisted on buying the two whiskies and they drank to a better understanding between dogs and men.

"I was in charge of an advanced company," sobbed Mr. Smith, "and we came on this ruined village. The Jerries had taken it on the run and we lit on a house cramfull of champagne. Mess headquarters. And here was this little pup, all alone. Let's have another, Joe."

"Soon as I saw the wine," Mr. Smith went on, "I sent the boys along to mop up the rest of the village. I picked up the pup in my arms along with a bottle of vino and came out on the street. You gotta have discipline in the Army, you know."

"Sure thing," agreed my friend, holding up two fingers to the bartender.

"As I was saying," continued Mr. Smith, wiping the tears away, "I came out and fell over a pedestal. And who do you think was on it but Joan of Arc! Sore as a boil, too. She says, 'I'll

thank you for the pup, Sergeant. You've no business carrying a dog around here when you're drunk!'"

"She must have been a fine woman," said my friend, downing his fourth.

"Maybe so, maybe so. But on the tough side. She said she'd put a curse on me if I didn't take the pledge with her right there and then. And she was going to take the pup away if I didn't. So of course I signed up."

"What's all this got to do with your old dog taking this last run-out?" asked my friend.

"Everything," sobbed Mr. Smith, "everything. As he's been getting older he's been getting sorer. Everytime I would come home with a snootful he would go and sulk. . . ."

Here Mr. Smith's emotions got the better of him and it took two whiskies apiece to get him back to his story.

"I came in here last night as full as a tick," sobbed Mr. Smith. "And that old dog comes in through the swing doors and up to me. He looks me over disgusted-like and says, 'Dammit to hell, don't you remember what Joan of Arc told you? I'm through.'"

"And with that, believe me or not, he ups and dives past me and through the doors. I've seen neither hair nor hide of him since and I know now that I never will."

#### IV

James Whitcomb Riley once wrote :

Dogs, I contend, is jes' about  
Nigh human — git 'em studied out,  
I hold, like us, they've got their own  
Reasonin' powers 'at's theirs own —

Indiana's immortal poet-laureate loved and understood dogs and he knew that mongrels were the smartest among all dogs. They say that his rickety old front porch in that quiet backwater of Indianapolis where he lived always had two or three curs sprawled over it in nice kind of weather. Cold weather — and they sort of hibernated, but with the first violet there they were — out on the creaky, twisted boards close to the beloved rhymester's feet.

Everett Watkins, once a famous Washington correspondent but now ruminating in Peru, Indiana, has a storehouse of unwritten Riley stories. In his boyhood days Mr. Watkins used literally to sit at the feet of the Hoosier poet, among the dogs, come warm weather.

Mr. Watkins often claims that the tales Mr. Riley used to tell his audiences of growing boys and assorted dogs, if they had been gathered into books or if the poet had got round to writing them, would easily have doubled the Riley output as we who still love him and read him over and over again know that inadequate supply.

"Nigh human?" questioned Mr. Riley this particular spring morning as he pointed his almost empty high-ball glass at the boy, Watkins.

"A dog like that one nestlin' by you now, why he's much smarter'n you'll ever be."

And then Mr. Riley launched into the never-written story of the mongrel who broke the plate-glass window

in the hardware store in Greenfield, where the poet was born and where he used to return so often in later years just to be in the house where he came into the world and just to "feel" his mother — long dead — so close beside him.

This Greenfield hardware merchant had remodeled his store front and — something new at the turn of the century — had installed a huge stretch of plate glass.

The merchant had also moved his display back a foot or so instead of jamming it all up flat against the window; in a word, he was up-to-date and his store was the pride and joy of Greenfield.

A little ragged newsboy, probably a man of prominence today, used to sell his papers outside the hardware store. The winter of the arrival of the beautiful store window was exceptionally severe and there came a morning colder than all the others which had gone before. And there was the little boy, almost frozen, out on the street and with him, as usual, was a small dog of assorted ancestry as nearly frozen as his master.

The hardware man opened the door and beckoned the youngster to come in and warm himself. The boy hesitated and then asked if his dog could come in with him; but the merchant said no, that dogs were not allowed in that grand store. The boy came in sort of reluctantly and stood by the window while his faithful mutt stared at him through the beautiful plate glass — longingly and shiveringly.

Suddenly there echoed through the store a report as loud as that of a pistol shot. The owner came rushing from the back to see a huge crack right across his twelve feet of splendid window. As he stared in angry amazement the mongrel, with the uncanny intuition of mongrels — smarter'n humans, as Mr. Riley put it — turned tail and ran.

The little dog's warm breath on the

window as he stared at his master had broken the glass! The hardware man had not as yet arranged his insurance, and it cost him over a hundred dollars to replace the damage.

But he was a sport and when he got his new window — the cold spell still hanging on — he hung out a card which said: "Little boys who are cold can come in but must bring their dogs with them."



### PHRASE ORIGINS—13

**GET HEP:** *In the 1890s, the story runs, one Joe Hep ran a saloon in Chicago frequented by criminals of various sorts. Joe, it seems, was not very bright, but he was bright enough to realize shortly that professionals were favoring him with their patronage. Sensing that big things were afoot, he began to hover about, absorbing all he could from the conversation of his customers. Although he never quite understood what was going on, he thought he did, and considered himself proudly "in" on every "touch" that came off. The "grifters" encouraged him in his delusion, and so Joe Hep's name entered the argot as an ironic appellation for anyone who thought he knew but didn't. The ironic sense has now largely disappeared from elements of the name surviving in the phrases, "to get Joe to" or "to get hep to" somethings. As a verb it appears in "Let me Joe you to that racket"; the surname does not enjoy parallel usage, but one might say, "Let me put you hep" or "put you Joe," meaning let me inform or instruct you. The term has been sometimes corrupted to "hip"; and circus "grifters" have created for this mythical Joe a brother named Bill Hep.*

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