

MACLEAN'S

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The dog drew back and regarded him impatiently.

He was only a city dog, obeyed commands. But he unheeded the voice of an injured man . . . and an instinct older than history

Dog Story

By WILL. F. JENKINS

THE DOG licked at the man's face, whimpering anxiously. The man lay in a little hollow, with a trail of fresh earth and dislodged stones where he had slipped down the hillside. Mountains reared up on every side and the man and dog were like ants in a vast emptiness of sky and wilderness. The dog licked and licked. The man stirred very feebly—and the dog's ears pricked up joyously—and then relaxed again. The dog drew back and regarded him impatiently. He wagged his tail, but the man did not respond. He licked once more. Then he could not restrain himself. He barked suddenly; one of those explosive sounds, half bark and half impatient yelp, with which a dog expresses his exasperation at a delay he does not understand. The man's eyes opened. He said weakly:

"Get back, old boy. Wait a minute."

He tried to move, and as his head cleared his expression changed. Strength came back. He worked himself to a sitting position, leaning against the bank he'd slid down. He fumbled over his own body. When he found broken ribs on one side, he winced a little. When he tested his legs, and one of them did not respond, he swallowed. He swept his eyes grimly about the utter desolation which surrounded him. He was high in the hills, in absolute wilderness, with a broken leg and cracked ribs, and it was unthinkable that he should be looked for, and inconceivable that any other human being would come this way by accident.

The dog nuzzled him. The man scratched absently, his face very pale. The two of them were as isolated from the rest of humanity as if they had been on the

moon. The dog wore a wide, brass-studded collar. The man had on a perfectly normal mountaineering costume, though this had not been intended as an actual climb. It was a trial trip for certain items of equipment, and a workout for the man's own wind and endurance.

He was an amateur mountain climber, with designs on the north peak of Mount Pierce for later on in the climbing season, and he'd essayed a day of completely trivial climbing—with the dog for company—as a prize fighter may exercise by shadowboxing. But it was so trivial a climb that he'd been careless.

He and the dog had arrived at the tiny railroad town down below only this morning. They'd come briskly out of the small settlement without informing anyone of their destination. Man and dog, together, had travelled perhaps three miles and had climbed some 3,000 feet altogether. The man had been well-satisfied. One item of equipment had proved as uncomfortable as he suspected it would be. He'd taken it off and thrown it away. For the rest, the jaunt had been so easy that it was no more than a training exercise—and now the man lay crippled in a vast emptiness, with other humans quite oblivious and invisible no more than three miles away and 3,000 feet down. Down tortuous mountainsides they would never dream of climbing.

"Get back, old boy," said the man grimly. "Don't jump on me."

The dog regarded his master perplexedly. The man was awake, now, and he spoke. He should get up and continue this fascinating journey through blissfully

unlimited space and innumerable smells. But the man fumbled out a cigarette and lighted it. His face was white and pinched with pain. The dog cocked his head on one side.

Something scuttled into underbrush a little distance off. Instantly the dog dashed valourously after it. It vanished. The dog sniffed absorberly on its trail. He heard a rustling on the farther side of the brushwood clump. He plunged around there, and emitted a tiny yelp. Then he barked energetically and thrashed about, searching. Presently he came into view again, looking for the man. He favored one forepaw. The man had not moved. The dog lay down, suddenly, and licked at his paw. He licked again and again and again. He nibbled at his paw, as at a flea.

The man stirred. Only his arm moved, but the dog was up in an instant. He wagged his tail. The man frowned, searching with his eyes. The dog hobbled over to the man on three paws and very gracefully offered to shake hands. The man said impatiently:

"Don't bother me, old boy. I've got to think of something . . ."

The dog flattened his ears apologetically and offered the paw again. He stroked the air with it, pleadingly. His tail wagged restlessly. He grinned and panted a little. He offered his paw insistently.

"I'm in a jam, old boy—Oh!"

The man took the paw. There was a burr in among the pads. Not a large burr. Not even a painful one. But the dog had come to his master to have it removed. It was a pattern of conduct. He asked for help in this discomfort as he asked for water and for food, and as he coaxed the man—in the city—to be taken for a walk on a leash.

The man plucked the burr out. He was very pale indeed, and in some pain. The dog licked his hand as

the man released him, and instantly went dashing away. For minutes he hovered and peered at the small creature which had evaded him before. It had disappeared. The dog went out of sight. Five minutes. Ten. He appeared at a swift run, dashed up to the man, panted in his face, and dashed off again.

THE man finished his cigarette and threw it away. He fumbled in his pocket and got out a knife. He slit his coat into three-inch strips and peeled it from his body. He knotted the strips together and began to wind them painfully about his ribs. The only practical treatment for broken ribs is to strap them. To immobilize them as far as possible. A constricting band about his body might have somewhat the effect of adhesive-tape strapping, and might make it possible for him to move. He was tightly encased. He tried to tighten the bandage still more. But he went white to the lips. He could not pull the bandages tight enough to be of any use. The effort brought on such pain that it defeated itself.

The dog came over a hillock, panting. He came to the man and sank down happily beside him. His tongue lolled and his eyes drooped. His tail thrashed the green stuff on either side of him. He regarded his master worshipfully.

The man made a gesture as if throwing a stick. The dog was on his feet in a moment. He took a few steps away, looking back. The man made the gesture again. It hurt. He called:

"Go fetch it, old boy!"

The dog scooped busily. Presently he brought a stick and laid it down proudly. It was rotten. It would not serve to tighten the bandages. The man again made the gesture of throwing. The dog grinned at him wistfully. He was not to be fooled. The man made a stick to throw. He had not thrown it. The dog panted happily, delighted with the jest and even more delighted that his master jested with him.

The man took the man's long time to get the tail dog to bring him other sticks. It was quite half an hour before he had a foot of sapling which was sound enough to use as a twisting stick. The man put it in the bandage about his chest and twisted it, tourniquet fashion. The bandage grew taut. It hurt, but when it was done the ribs were supported and the man felt easier.

There was a clump of brushwood some 20 yards away. He essayed to drag himself there. The man put his ribs it would have been easy enough. Under the circumstances it took him an hour, and he was wet with the cold sweat of anguish when he had made it. The dog could not understand the slow and bogging progress. He lingered about the man, repeatedly urging him to get up. Toward the end he grew bored and went roving off again by himself.

The man had to rest for a long time when he reached the spot he had chosen. Presently some color came gradually back into his cheeks. The dog came rushing into view, to make sure he had not been left behind. His jaws were wet. He had found water, and had drunk.

"Easy, old boy," said the man. "Don't set on . . ."

Then he almost cried out. The dog, wriggling excitedly at the sound of his voice, had bumped into his injured leg. It was swelling a little now. But the man was sure that it was a clean break. If it could be set at once . . .

He tried to set it. He tied the injured foot to the base of a small sapling. He laid himself flat and pushed with the other foot, and pulled with his arms at another small root. The purpose was to stretch the broken ribs so the severed bone ends would snap into place again. It was not pleasant. He became nauseated with sheer suffering. He ground his teeth and thrust with every possible atom of strength and resolution. He thought he felt the bone slip into place the instant before darkness overwhelmed him. He came to himself and it was night. The dog licked his face, again whimpering. The man put the broken leg, and lighted a cigarette. He smoked it to the end. Then he fumbled and found thin stalks and cut through them, and laid them alongside the injured leg and wrapped them firmly with more strips from his coat. He was not sure that the bone was set, but he could do no more.

Darkness grew more intense. The night air grew cold. The dog muzzled him under the man's hand. The man put his arms around the animal and held him close for warmth. He had ruined his coat and he had no blankets. He had not expected to camp, and now he did not really expect ever to return. From this climb which was to have been merely exercise.

But he held the dog close, all night. Once, while the man dozed lightly in spite of his discomfort, the dog heard some cryptic sound and leaped up

violently to bark at it. The man was startled painfully awake. He was stiff and cold and his leg throbbled horribly. The dog came back, presently, and cuddled close to the man again. But many times he reared his head up to listen to noises the man never heard have detected. Once he growled so throatily. The man did not have much rest, but the warmth of the dog's body was grateful.

NEXT morning the man's injuries were much more painful and he was much stiffer. He ground his teeth together and worked himself to a sitting position. He gave himself breakfast. It was a quarter of a bar of chocolate he had brought to serve as lunch the day before. The dog watched avidly as his master ate. He was a well-mannered dog and knew better than to coax for food, ordinarily, but he watched with bright eyes and licked his chops enviously when the man had finished.

"Go catch a squirrel, boy," said the man shortly. "At least you can run! But you're a city dog. You don't know about such things, do you?"

The dog flattened his ears and wagged his tail. He came forward and touched the man's hand in a delicate suggestion—not exactly a hint—that he also needed chocolate. He looked eagerly at the man's pocket.

"No dice, old boy," said the man. "Too bad you can't understand. You could take a message for me if you did. But you wouldn't leave me all alone."

He took out his pocketknife. He searched overhead among the saplings he had crawled to. The dog stood up with a disappointed air. The man chose a sapling with a definite fork some six feet or so above the ground. The man's manner seemed to indicate that this was not going to work, but he had to try it. He began to whittle through the base of the sapling.

The dog nosed interestedly at the first chippings. The man pushed his muzzle away. He worked doggedly, his expression the reverse of hopeful. The dog watched with his head on one side until it was obvious that nothing exciting was apt to happen. Then he trotted off at a businesslike fashion. But he turned his head and looked back, just before going out of sight.

In something over an hour the sapling was down and rimmed into what should have amounted to a crutch. But for his broken ribs, the man might have used a crutch handsily. Now he meant to try it anyway. There was nothing else to do. But it was not promising.

There was a barking in the distance. The tentative, exasperated barking of a dog who does not know exactly what to do about something. It stopped and began again. Suddenly there was a yelp and then passionate and infuriated barkings, mingled with yelps. Then silence.

The man looked steadily in that direction. There was a little rustle. Then stillness again. He saw the dog, crouched down, biting at something. He got up and came limping. Twice he paused to work at his paw with his tongue or teeth. Each time he ceased and looked toward the man.

"Come here, boy," said the man. "What's happened to you?"

The dog flattened his ears and wagged his tail. He came limping onward, holding one forepaw high off the ground. He made a little whimpering noise.

"Hm," said the man. "Porcupine, eh? You got off lightly, at that."

There were three quills stuck in the dog's paw. He had very evidently seen a strange animal, and it neither made friendly gestures, nor defiant ones, nor ran away from him. The porcupine had simply curled up into a ball and stayed still. The dog had barked at it impatiently to urge it to some understandable behavior. He'd danced about it, barking more and more excitedly, and finally had reached out a tentative paw to insist on unequivocal action. Which—with a porcupine—was a mistake.

"Come along," said the man. "I'll pull 'em out." The dog limped up to him and waved the hurt paw imploringly. All good dogs acquire the instinct to go to a human being for help in trouble. The man held the paw firmly and plucked out the first quill. The dog was curious about the hostility, and finally had the pain of it the dog jerked violently, and the man winced. The sudden movement had hurt him too. But instantly the dog muzzled his hand as if in apology, and then sat down and licked the injured paw. He was only three tiny holes in it, but he licked them elaborately.

The man set his jaw. He grasped one fairly stout sapling as high as he could reach. He doubled his good leg under him and braced against the sapling. He gave one strong thrust with his foot and a powerful heave with his arm—and he stood on the sound leg with legs of cold sweat standing on his forehead.

He stood there a moment. Then he fitted the improvised crutch under his armpit, set his teeth again, and tried a step. It simply did not work. Not with broken ribs, even supported by a tightened bandage. At the first step the man's face went ashen-white. At the third the world went black about him. But he could not have climbed down 3,000 feet anyhow. Not with a crutch.

HE OPENED his eyes again to find the dog standing over him unhappily. But when the man looked at the dog he saw that he was becoming accustomed to odd behavior on the part of his master now. He waggled his tail and went back to licking his paw.

A long time later the man edged himself back to a sitting position among the saplings. The dog looked up at him and wagged briefly.

"It's funny, old boy!" asked the man steadily. "You can't see what's the matter, can you?"

The dog flattened his ears. The man lighted a cigarette with fingers that shook a little.

"I could crawl," he said dispassionately, "if it weren't for my ribs. Or I could probably walk if it weren't for my leg. Or you could take a message out for me if you could understand. As it is, there isn't anything to be done. Nobody ever comes up here. I'm finished—by a climb I figured as an afternoon stroll, and after all the really dangerous places I've climbed!"

"He smoked. Presently he fumbled in his pocket. He found an envelope and slit it carefully. He wrote on it with a stylographic pen. His face was composed but very grim. He wrote carefully, and then rolled the paper up. He took off his necktie and brought out a key ring with many jangling keys on it.

"Come here, boy!"

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He came leaping back bringing the hot . . .



Dog Story

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The dog came expectantly. He submitted—licking the man's hand—while the key ring was made fast to his collar with the man's necktie. Then the note. The paper was plainly visible but secure. The necktie and key ring would call for investigation if any man ever saw it.

"You'll be going away from here sooner or later," said the man grimly. "I hope sooner. This note will tell somebody that you're a good dog and where to find me. They'll come for me, eventually. But I don't think it's going to do much good.—You're a good dog, old boy!"

The dog licked his face.

"Now—go home!" said the man sharply. "Go home, boy!"

The dog looked at him bewilderedly. The man repeated the command. The dog backed away, and half-heartedly started to move off. But there was no "home" from this place. It was an order which could not be obeyed. The dog stopped. His ears drooped. He wagged his tail placatingly.

"Go home!" commanded the man sternly. "Home, boy!"

The dog bewilderedly moved again, and again stopped. He flattened his ears. The man's voice grew sterner yet. The dog seemed to wilt, as if he were being scolded.

"Go home, boy!" ordered the man angrily.

The dog hesitated, and then lay down, miserably, facing his master. The man thundered the order. The dog wagged humbly. He looked utterly abashed. He crawled toward the man, his ears flat, imploring and wagging his tail beseechingly. He dragged himself toward his master on his belly, pleading for a change in the attitude of the man who was his god. He touched the man's thigh with his nose, writhing; his ears flattened, his tongue lolling, quivering with desire to have the intolerable order rescinded.

Even to strike him would not have driven him actually away. The man fell silent. The dog nudged him beseechingly. The man did not respond—but he did not repeat the order. The dog grew bolder. He nudged again, his tail wagging violently, flat on his belly. He suddenly pushed up with his forepaws and licked at the man's face. It was coaxing that was irresistible. The man yielded.

"You can't understand, eh, boy?"

THE dog bounced. He dashed madly away and scuttled crazily in circles as a puppy. He ran up to his master and panted joyously at him, and made other lunatic circlings, and then came trotting back, bouncing at every step. He nuzzled the man with the blissful confidence of a dog who has re-established, completely, satisfactory relations. And, nuzzling, he sniffed the remainder of the chocolate, which was all the food the man could ever hope to have. He nosed at the pocket. He sat down, two feet from his master. His eyes sparkled. His tongue lolled. He begged, mutely. He reached forward with his nose and touched the pocket quickly, and regarded the man with bright eyes. Then he barked impatiently.

"That means maybe three or four more days of living," said the man grimly. "I don't know why I intend to hang on to the last moment, but I do.—You've got to go away, boy! You've got to! I won't have you around! Go and find some food.—You can't understand that? Go on, old boy." Then with a consciously ironic humor, he said, "Go fetch humans, boy! Go fetch men!"

The dog stood up bewilderedly. The man frowned suddenly. His eyes grew sharp. Then he waved his hand up the slope down which he had fallen.

"Go fetch, boy!" His voice was taut and tense. He brought out a bit of chocolate. He broke off a fragment and held it up. "Go fetch! Go fetch!"

The dog barked delightedly. The man waved at the slope. The dog hesitated and then dashed up it, bounding here and there. He went to and fro, quartering the ground.

He came leaping back, bringing the man's hat, lost at the time of his fall. He laid it gleefully at his master's feet. The man took a quick deep breath—and winced. He gave the dog chocolate. "Good dog! Now fetch again. Go fetch, boy! Go fetch!"

He waved in the same direction. The dog went bounding off once more. Time passed. Birds called. The sun moved perceptibly across the sky. The dog came back, panting. He brought nothing. The man said sternly: "I said, go fetch! Look!" He displayed another bit of chocolate. "Go fetch!"

The dog flattened his ears apologetically. His tail wagged, low to the ground. But the man was stern. He pointed up the slope and repeated his command. The dog, drooping a little, ran up the slope and disappeared again. He was gone for a very long time. The man grew nervous. He lighted a cigarette, and another when that burned out. He looked tensely up at the spot where the dog might be expected to reappear. Half an hour.

The dog came bounding down the slope with a strip of leather in his mouth. It was a belt, a mountain climber's belt, fitted with assorted hooks for safety line and ice axe and crampons. It was a new design, and the man had tried it, but after 2,000 feet of climbing he'd thrown it angrily away because it was uncomfortable. Now the dog brought it back to him triumphantly. He'd back-trailed nearly two miles, questing some personal possession the man might have dropped—like the hat. He dropped it at the man's feet, panting.

"Good dog!" said the man. He drew in a sharp breath, and hardly winced at the pain it brought. His eyes were feverishly intent as he petted the dog and fed him chocolate. He petted the dog for a long time, while he rested.

"Now," said the man again, "once more, boy! Go fetch!" He showed more chocolate. He

petted the dog. And he repeated his command.

The dog was a bit reluctant. But presently he went, not overeagerly, in the direction the man pointed. He disappeared for the third time along the back trail. The mountains looked very cold and barren. This place seemed more than ever inhospitable and wilderness and remote.

TIME passed. A long time. A very long time. The sun moved overhead and declined toward the west. The shadows of the mountains lengthened. The man smoked. His face was white and drawn with pain. He lay in a small hollow among hills of no possible use to men. Only three miles away—but 3,000 feet down—other human beings lived comfortably. But they would never climb the mountain without cause. Dusk fell. The dog did not come back.

But . . . There was still a faint pink lingering in the sky behind the mountains when he heard voices. Men and dogs, far away. He shouted. Someone fired a gun in reply. Then the voices drew nearer, and darkness deepened, and presently the beams of electric flashlights flickered down from the exact spot where he had tumbled. And then there were eager whimpers, and someone followed the dog down to the man, holding back violently as the dog pulled. He was on leash now. He was very happy to see his master. He whimpered and whined and licked the injured man's face.

"They wouldn't let you run back, boy?" asked the man unsteadily. "So you worried? Good dog!"

The dog licked and whined and wriggled. The man scratched him said casually:

"Doc's pickin' his way down the slope now. Fix you up in no time, fella.—Say, that dog come into town an' sniffed around like he was huntin' for somethin', an' somebody noticed the way he was fixed up, so we caught him. Then we come along as soon as we could. Kinda nice dog, that.—Crazy about candy, huh?"

The doctor came down the slope, winced but valiant, prepared to do miracles of surgery by flashlight. The others—the men who'd come prepared to be litter bearers—built a fire to smoke by while the doctor made a professional job of the man's own bandaging. They petted the dog. Presently there was laughter. The dog pawed at his mouth with first one forepaw and then the other. He shook his head bewilderedly. He rubbed his face on the ground.

The doctor drew adhesive tape tightly about the injured man's ribs. The dog came thrusting through the men toward his master, pausing again and again to rub at his mouth with his paw. He dodged the doctor and thrust his nose into the injured man's hand. He whimpered. The sound was querulous. Unhappy.

"What's the matter, boy?" The dog's master fumbled, though the doctor still worked on him. Then he said, "Oh! Somebody gave you candy? Chewy stuff? Stuck your jaws together? All right, boy! Wait just a minute and I'll fix it for you!"