

THE SMART SET

A MAGAZINE OF
CLEVERNESS

Manuscripts, to receive prompt attention, should be addressed, "Editor of THE SMART SET."

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FORTY POUNDS OF GOLD

By George Catton

The dog, we say, is man's most faithful friend: he will remain true to his master when everyone else has deserted him. Here is a story of a man who stuck by his dog, and was willing to gamble with his own life rather than sacrifice his dumb companion. Humanitarians will get a shock at the conclusion of this story.

“CLOSE the door!”

The authoritative command, pitched high, and rank with genuine fear, swept across the corridor from the elevator shaft and came in through the keyhole of my door. I raised my head to listen.

“Close the door!” The hoarse voice rose to a shriek in the repeated command, a nerve-racking scream of terror like the last vocal protest of a degenerate before the trap is sprung that drops him into eternity! I held my breath, waiting—waiting!

The gruff tones of Carl, the elevator man, broke the terrible silence. “Wait a minute, mister—” he began, his voice cool, calm, expostulating. Then it was suddenly stilled, as though a hand had been clapped across his mouth; a short, sharp scuffle followed, the elevator gate slammed shut and, springing to my feet, I jerked open the door.

The elevator had started up, and the floor above hid the faces of the occupants of the car—Carl and another, much taller, man. Carl was jammed into a corner, the other man's right hand fast in his shirt front, his left hand clutching at the lever that controlled the car. That much I saw at a glance; then the car passed up beyond the floor above.

What had happened? My first thought was that Carl had been arrested, but I dismissed it when I remembered

that it had been the other man's voice I had heard with the fear behind it. I glanced down the hall. It was deserted. I turned my head and looked up the stairway.

She was coming down the steps, her black hood but half hiding her short yellow curls, her fox muff swinging from her wrist, singing “The Trail of the Lonesome Pine.” At her heels a large light-haired dog dodged from side to side, trying vainly to catch the elusive fur. Just a little slip of a maid she was, hardly out of school. Surely no man would be afraid of her! Yet there was no one else in the hall. There had been no one else in the corridor at the time, for my door was the last one down and the next was fifty feet away. I paced the distance to make sure. If there had been anyone there I should have seen him when I opened my door; he couldn't possibly have got away. Yet the owner of that voice had been hysterically afraid of something. What was it?

I walked across to the elevator shaft and rang the bell, noticing as I did so that the car started immediately downward. I stepped in when Carl opened the gate.

“What was wrong with that man you just took up?” I asked, assuming an indifferent air and motioning with my hand that I wished to go down. He held up a five-dollar gold piece and shook his head. I could get no in-

formation there. You can do anything with Carl if you can afford it and know how to offer your remuneration.

I questioned the clerk. He hadn't heard anything of or about it. Dinner passed, and though I searched among the guests, trying to locate the man by his clothes, for I hadn't seen his face, I was as much in the dark as ever. No one but myself seemed to have even heard about it; even the little girl shook her head when I asked her if she had heard any unusual noise when she was coming downstairs. Every turn I made, every question I asked, only deepened the mystery.

Now when an incident like that occurs in a hotel like the Gibson, with upward of three hundred guests daily on the register, one would naturally expect that the house detective would be among the first to hear about it. I decided I'd ask him. I had other reasons, too, for going to him.

The Gibson house detective and I have been friends, good friends, for three years. Like Doctor Watson, I go along with my friend the detective as an assistant and often try to discover his methods. Of late there has sprung up a sort of rivalry between us. I don't claim to possess any ability in the detection of crime—I leave that to him—but I do try to "beat him to it" as he puts it. For a year I have been trying to catch him ignorant of something that has occurred in the house, and as I knocked on his door I couldn't refrain from smiling. I was the only one in the building who had heard of or knew about the voice in the elevator—I was certain of that.

He was reading when I went in, and I imagined from his smile that he had been expecting me. But he didn't say anything till I had filled my pipe and lighted it; then he raised his eyes from his book and regarded me with an amused expression upon his face.

"Well," he asked, "what's the joke?"

I lit another match and slowly, tantalizingly, applied it to my pipe. I had waited and worked a long while to get ahead of him, and now that I had succeeded I was in no hurry. "What

are you reading?" I questioned. "Robert Service's poems?"

He frowned and looked across at me fixedly for a moment. "No," he replied shortly, raising his book to examine the title. "This is entitled, 'The Mystery of the Elevator—or What Was He Afraid Of?'"

My pipe went out. I didn't have enough ambition left to pull on it. He knew all about it then; and I had imagined I alone had heard it! Maybe Carl had told him. After I had succeeded in swallowing my chagrin, and when his smile came back, I asked him.

"No," he replied, "I didn't need to ask anyone. I am personally acquainted with the man himself. He lives in the house here, and has a suite of rooms on this floor. I can't tell you anything more definite than that; he doesn't want his peculiarity generally known!"

"But what was he afraid of?" I demanded. "There wasn't a soul in the hall but a little girl."

"Sure?"

"Certainly!" I snapped; I hadn't quite got over my disappointment. "There wasn't a sign of anything in sight but the girl and her dog."

"Ah, a dog!" He laid down his book and lighted his pipe. "That's what he is afraid of—a dog."

"A dog?"

"H'm, a dog," he replied. "Not every breed of dogs, nor yet any particular, individual dog, but just a Scotch collie. He will cross the street a dozen times a day so as not to have to pass one. Many a time I have taken him to task about it."

"I don't mind a French poodle," he will say. "I don't worry about bloodhounds or water spaniels or rat terriers, but a Scotch collie gets my subconscious goat!"

"His subconscious goat!" It was a new term to me, and I repeated it unconsciously aloud.

My friend smiled. "That's what he calls it. You see, he is a baseball fan, and has got into the habit of using slang words and phrases. 'Goat' is a slang term for nerve."

"But his subconscious nerve," I asked—"what does he mean by that?"

"Just what he says. He is not actually afraid of a Scotch collie. In fact, he is not afraid of anything. But when he passes one of those dogs, or even gets in close proximity to one, though he may not know of its presence, there's something inside, as he puts it, that gets to shaking; something that wants to turn and run; his 'subconscious goat.'"

"And the reason for it?" I inquired.

"Was he ever bitten by a Scotch collie?"

"Yes, that's the reason," he answered.

"And he carries some nasty scars as a memento of it. But though he was a grown man at the time, he cannot remember when he was bitten; he didn't know at the time that he was on the verge of becoming a meal for a dog."

"Can you tell me about it? Does your promise to him forbid you to go any further—with me?"

He studied my face seriously for a moment.

"No," he replied slowly; "I will tell you about it. But it's a long story and I'm thirsty." He rose and mixed two of his favorite drinks. "Cocktails," he calls them, but he is the first man I ever saw that puts Irish sloe gin and absinthe into the same cocktail. And while he worked I watched him, trying for the thousandth time to see past the many wrinkles in his face. I failed.

He is a peculiar man, my friend the detective; mentally and physically odd. You cannot describe him in feet and inches, colors and contour, and but poorly by comparison. The best I can do is to ask you to imagine a man with a face like Lincoln's, a body at least four inches longer than that great President's and a chest measurement of fifty and a half inches. He's broad and thick out of proportion. He gets his shoes made to order through necessity. Mentally his head controls his physical deformity perfectly. Morally — we'll consider that later on.

He's a Westerner, from Washington. Bones and brains and bloody red meat. He wears a collar at least an inch and a half higher than any fop's I ever saw; an absurdly high collar, and smokes

an eternal pipe; yet I've seen him lay violent hands on two men in the bar-room downstairs and alone and unaided take them both two blocks to the station.

He came well recommended. I know for a fact that the proprietor, an old prospector, had accepted his application chiefly because he recognized the ability in a man who had kept the pick of the Northwest Mounted Police hunting him for two years along the Arctic Circle, only to put up such an intelligent defense when they did get him back to civilization for trial, for the murder of his partner, that the jury, all Western men, acquitted him without retiring. But he lost the claim he had staked. As I watched his face I wondered if at any time he had known the proprietor in Alaska.

He resumed his seat and took a sip from his long glass. "It was in 1898, as near as I can remember, when"—he paused and took another swallow—"when Paul Chisholm went to the Yukon and started for the gold fields with a big Swede for a partner and a Scotch collie he had raised from a pup for a companion. A woman acquaintance gave him the pup, so naturally he was very fond of the dog. Also, when you've eaten and slept and lived with such an intelligent animal as a dog for three years in the roughest spots on the earth, you are very likely to become much attached to it. Paul thought a lot of that Scotch collie. He'd have missed it if it hadn't been close by somewhere all the time. The Swede kicked on the dog.

"'For why,' he asked, 'we tak that tam dog? For this country he is not a good breed—he eat so much like a man!'

"Paul looked up at the Swede. He was packing the grub at the time. Then he called the dog and petted him for a moment. If he had to choose, he'd prefer the dog, for he knew the dog. But he didn't want to lose the Swede. There wasn't a native Indian who knew Alaska as the Swede knew it; he had taken no less than four large fortunes into Dawson and left them, mostly,

with sundry bartenders and professional gamblers. Paul smiled knowingly.

"'He's food on the hoof, Curly,' he replied quietly. 'We don't have to carry him.' And the Swede let it go at that.

"They left Dawson in June, crossed the line and struck into the Tanana Hills. There were hundreds of prospectors, of all sizes and in all conditions of health, who left Dawson that spring. In pairs and singly, in parties of threes and fours and occasionally more, they faced north or west with visions of untold wealth before them and often very little behind them in the shape of food; then when the snow began to blot out the rugged landscape they drifted back. A half-dozen all told mushed in, straining under a poke as big as an Indian chief's headdress. Some crawled back on their hands and knees in the snow, with frozen feet and only a hazy idea of the location of the claim they had staked. A few are out there yet! Every now and again a round white skull floats down the rivers on the spring floods, or they find a human femur sticking up out of the earth, pointing up, or down, as you like to imagine, to the present abode of some cheechako. The big Swede's framework is kicking around up there yet, and he was a real old sourdough. Paul came back to register one of the richest strikes ever made in that God-forsaken hole and dodge Scotch colliers all the rest of his natural life."

The detective stopped abruptly and turned his head to listen. Out in the hall light footsteps hesitated at the door, then continued down the corridor. The detective smiled.

"It was the middle of August," he continued, "before they even imagined they saw the glint of color. Then the dog uncovered it!"

He paused again and refilled his pipe, his head sideways listening.

"They were having dinner at the time," he went on, "and had built a fire on the bank of a stream that roared down from the hills and emptied into Birch Creek, seventy miles to the north. The dog, excited and playful in antici-

pation of the food he knew he would soon get, raced around and dug holes. Suddenly the Swede's jaw quit working, and springing to his feet he ran across to the dog. For a moment he stood looking down into the hole the dog was pawing out in the sand; then he dropped to his knees and began to pet the dog.

"'The tam dog—the tam dog—the tam dog!' he muttered singingly, rocking himself sideways and scooping up the sand with his other hand. Then he looked up at Paul.

"'The tam dog!' he yelled excitedly. 'The tam dog he find—look!' The Swede was right!

"A few inches below the surface a broad outcropping of rotten rock, blotched and seamed and splashed with gold, ran down from the hills, crossed the valley and dove straight down in the middle of the creek. Centuries of spring floods had washed the hill sands down upon it and completely hidden it. They would have walked over it in their downward journey if the dog hadn't dug!

"By night they had staked the claim. In two weeks they had cleaned up enough out of the bed sands of the creek to give each man a load of forty pounds apiece. Forty pounds of, not dust, but broad, flat 'pumpkin seed' that wouldn't carry thirty pounds of dirt to the ton. Then they started back. They had just three hundred miles to go!"

Once again the detective paused to listen, and I imagined he was expecting someone. But I didn't speak.

"They had three hundred miles to go," he repeated, "and as they figured on making at least twenty miles a day, they packed enough of the remainder of the grub to last two weeks, caching the rest for use in the spring when they returned. But they didn't figure on Providence, and Providence has to be the chief consideration in Alaska. For instance: you can foretell the weather in any part of the world and come within some reasonable distance of the truth, but the oldest native in Alaska only shakes his head when you ask him of tomorrow. The Swede should have

known better than to have shortened their food supply when winter was so near, but to carry more food meant to leave some of the gold, and the Swede had been figuring on a blowout at Juneau that winter. Paul, too, had plans for the cold winter. They made half of the return journey before Providence interfered.

"The Swede slipped on a pebble and rolled down hill. When he got up he sat down again. His leg was broken!

"Paul set it. Once, in Arizona, he had set his own arm just because the nearest doctor happened to be forty miles away. Paul threw up a rough shack and sat down to wait till the Swede should be able to travel again. By that time there was a foot of snow on the ground. Several times, when it began to freeze up at sundown, Paul suggested going back for the food they had cached, or to go on to Dawson for help, but the Swede wouldn't listen. 'He didn't care to be left alone,' he said, but Paul knew otherwise. Paul knew the Swede didn't trust him, that the Swede thought he wouldn't come back. Even when he offered to leave the dog with him, the Swede said no, though he knew well that Paul wouldn't be parted from the dog. The result was that when the Swede hobbled out of the shack on the crutches Paul had whittled out for him, they had just grub enough for four days for all, or six days for the men and nothing for the dog, as the Swede suggested. But the dog got his share just the same.

"Just how much we have got?' the Swede asked. Paul told him.

"Four days!' the Swede repeated questioningly. 'Four days' food and—the dog?'

"Paul looked across at him for a moment. 'Maybe,' he replied. That night, when the Swede slept, he cleaned his gun.

"Next morning the Swede's leg was swollen to an alarming size and he couldn't move it, so when they finally did get started they carried their last mouthful inside. The Swede carried his crutches; Paul toted half the gold.

"They made forty-one miles in four days; then the Swede broke loose.

"Were you ever hungry?" My friend the detective turned to me with the question. "I don't mean just to miss a few meals—everybody does that at times—but did you ever have to go for days without even seeing a morsel of anything that could be converted into food? Were you ever forced to keep on your feet with a dull, dead ache in the pit of your stomach, feeling as though you'd swallowed a balloon?"

I confessed that my rather varied experience didn't include such dire straits.

"Neither had Paul," he went on. "Yet it was the Swede, who had nearly starved to death twice by his own telling, who cast longing eyes at the dog. He was trying to smoke at the time, and gagging over it, when he took his pipe out of his mouth and pointed across the fire at the dog.

"Tonight we eat?' he questioned gruffly. Paul studied the curly coat of his canine friend for a moment.

"No," he replied evenly. 'Not yet.' "The Swede leaned over and carelessly knocked out his pipe on the end of a burning stick. When he straightened up he had deftly replaced the pipe in his hand with the pistol that had hung at his hip.

"Tonight,' he rasped, 'we eat!' "Paul looked across at the yawning hole in the muzzle of the weapon. 'That's right,' he answered quietly, 'we do!'

"The Swede was taken aback. He knew quite well the love Paul had for the dog. He knew the man's nerve. He had expected trouble and it hadn't come; maybe that was why he didn't take ordinary precaution. Paul held out his hand to the dog.

"Here, Jamie!' he called quietly, slapping his leg encouragingly. 'Here, Jamie, come here!'

"The dog got up slowly and started toward the fire. He was getting as weak as the men. Paul called again, accompanying each call with a slap on his leg and watching the Swede the while out of the corner of his eye. The Swede

licked his lips and turned his eyes to the dog.

"Paul's hand, half raised above his leg, jerked suddenly straight upward, his body lurched sideways into the snow, the Swede's gun roared across the fire and a bullet whistled through where Paul's body had just been. Then came the answer, Paul's answer! The Swede never pulled trigger again!"

The detective refilled his long glass and left it untouched at his elbow. "After that Paul slept," he continued. "For five hours he slept the sleep of utter exhaustion; then he started on again, leaving the Swede's body where it lay. He was too weak to bury it; he was too weakly indifferent even to drive the dog away from the blood-stained snow across the fire. With his face to the east, and the low hills on the left as a guide, he dragged his heavy feet through the clinging snow for two days without a minute's rest; afraid, if he stopped, he would be unable to start again. A dozen times during those forty-eight hours he looked up to search ahead for the dog, and each time he half drew his revolver, only to push it back again and leer hideously when he tried to smile. The dog had been his companion for years, had been his only friend through scores of hardships; he had killed a man to save its life—he just couldn't kill him now even to save his own life. And the dog—every little while Jamie would come back in his trail and look up into the man's face with his bloodshot eyes and whine low, as if asking when it all would end.

"They had fifty miles to go when the man went down, pitched forward in the snow through sheer failure of muscle and lay there without moving. Physically he was all but gone; one thought only would stay in his head: Keep moving! If he kept on in the direction he was going he'd live! Half dead as he was, he didn't want to die. No one gets so near to death as really to welcome it. He knew he was down, and even had a faint idea of the distance yet to go; he knew if he killed the dog and ate it he'd win out with days to spare. But the dog? No! He couldn't kill Jamie!

"After a while his mental horizon cleared a little. He got upon his knees and started on again. Hand over hand in the dog's trail he crawled, his dragging legs leaving a faint stain on the snow where it wore his trousers away. All day he crawled with the lagging dog just a little ahead; hour after hour, till the day—a day that had dwindled into but a patch on the long darkness—slipped into the night and wore out into the daylight. Again, he lurched forward toward the east, and a chance to live. But he didn't make it!

"Thirty-nine miles—a scant hour on a train—lay between him and life when consciousness left him, and he stopped crawling, to lie very still in the wet slushy snow, a trickle of blood oozing from the corners of his mouth."

The detective stopped abruptly and half rose to his feet, his eyes on the door as if he thought someone was coming in. Then he sat down again and drained his long glass. I listened, too, and again I heard the soft footfalls on the hall floor, but they passed on again, so he continued:

"When Paul went down for the last time, the dog was fifty feet ahead, but he didn't go much farther. Turning around, he waited a few minutes to see if his master would get up again; then he came back whining piteously. The man didn't move. He poked his nose beneath the man's face and turned his head over. It stayed there. The dog licked him affectionately; licked his cheeks and neck and hair and chin. And his tongue went back into his mouth red with blood from the man's lips!

"For a moment he mouthed on the thin, sticky fluid, his dull eyes brightening, his gaunt flanks heaving; then he turned with a vicious snarl, drove his mouth into the man's throat and sank his teeth into the flesh!

"The man's body fought the dog. The man was unconscious of it all; he cannot remember when he quit crawling. Over and over in the snow they rolled, the man's hands clutching at the dog's head, the dog's four paws clawing at the heavy clothing that encased the 'food.' He was too weak to risk letting

go for a fresh hold for his teeth. Then the struggle ceased as suddenly as it began, with the dog uppermost.

"Over on the left a team of six huskies swung around a hill and stopped. A shot rang out, and Jamie, the Scotch collie, let go his hold and toppled over.

"They carried him into Dawson and found, when they undressed him, that he had forty pounds of gold—broad, flat flakes of it—around his waist. He had forgotten it was there. In two weeks he was on his feet again, thanks to his abnormal constitution and the influence of the small fortune he had brought in."

A knock sounded on the door and a boy pushed his head in.

"There's a man downstairs," he said, looking at me, "that wants to see you. He says to tell you he's in a hurry."

I got up and swung the door open. "And ever since then," I questioned,

"Paul has been afraid of a Scotch collie?" I stepped through the door, the doorknob in my hand, waiting for his answer before I went downstairs.

"Close the door!"

I whirled around. It was the same fear-stricken voice I had heard in the elevator in the afternoon. My friend the detective had got upon his feet and was standing behind the table, his face white and drawn, his eyes wide with genuine fear!

"Shut the door!" he roared again, gripping the table to steady his shrinking body. I obeyed the wild command and found myself in the hall, face to face with the girl and the dog. She was just coming out of the room opposite, and the dog had been waiting outside. It had been the soft patter of his feet we had heard in the hall. The dog, I noticed, was a Scotch collie.

So, after all, there was a reason for the Gibson house detective's absurdly high collar.

