

# BEYOND FANTASY FICTION

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## CONTENTS

### NOVELETS

THE WALL AROUND THE WORLD	2	by Theodore R. Cogswell
THE DREAM MAKERS	64	by Robert Bloch
THE KING OF THE ELVES	142	by Philip K. Dick

### SHORT STORIES

WIRE-HAIRED RADICAL	30	by Joseph Shallit
CAN SUCH BEAUTY BE?	43	by Jerome Bixby
TALENT	56	by Theodore Sturgeon
A LITTLE PILE	91	By M. C. Pease
HOW DO I DO?	99	by John Wyndham
AND NOT QUITE HUMAN	113	by Joe L. Hensley
KID STUFF	121	by Isaac Asimov
THE GODDESS ON THE STREET CORNER	134	by Margaret St. Clair

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# WIRE-HAIRED RADICAL

By JOSEPH SHALLIT

*Think you're living a dog's life?  
Man, you never had it that good...*

**I**T came as a stinging surprise to all the dogs in the neighborhood. Terry had always been well-liked. Even dogs who ordinarily didn't care for wire-haired terriers liked Terry. He was friendly, easy-going. He shared food—sometimes even steak—and

he'd never been known to say a good word about people. Never. That was what got everybody. He hadn't ever said anything out of line until now.

Terry was lying in the high grass of the vacant lot when he said the thing. With him at the

Illustrated by CAVAT

time were a springer spaniel named Spud, a shaggy, smallish Gordon setter named Woodsy, and a big collie named Jumper.

The spaniel growled uncomfortably when Terry stopped talking. "Cut it out, Terry," he said. "I don't like to hear that kind of talk even as a joke!"

"I'm not joking," Terry said quietly. "That's what I'm going to do."

"You mean it? You really mean it?" sputtered the setter.

"Of course he doesn't mean it," said the spaniel.

"Let's change the subject," said the big collie, rolling over and rubbing his back in the rough grass. "It's not decent."

**T**ERRY scratched thoughtfully behind his right ear. "Don't think I've decided this on the spur of the moment. I've thought about it a good long while. Every time I look at Miss Harrington, I feel . . . well, I feel I just owe it to her to tell her—"

"I'll bite your head off if you talk like that again!" yelped the spaniel. "She's a Bloop! Get that into your skull. A *Bloop!*"

"So what? Can't I feel I owe something to a Bloop?" Terry said.

"No, damn you—no!"

"Do you realize," said the collie, standing up, "that it's an insult to all of us for you to talk like that?"

"It is not," Terry complained. "All I said was—"

"You said you owed something to a Bloop!" blurted the shaggy little setter.

"All right, I did," Terry said darkly. "Some Bloops I know are a lot finer than—"

"But they're still Bloops!" yelped the spaniel. "They're still our dupes, our suckers. Do you realize that one little word out of your damn silly mouth could wreck everything we've built up for four thousand years? Everything! Everything that's happened, all the way back to Amenhabi!"

At the sound of the revered name, all the dogs, including Terry, stiffened and wagged their tails piously, once to the right, once to the left.

"I don't see why you have to bring religion into it," said Terry, after an uneasy silence.

"Well, that happens to be exactly what it is—religion," snapped the big collie. "Amenhabi—" again every tail wagged reverently—"left us a code we've all sworn to live by—you just the same as the rest of us, Terry. We've sworn never to talk where any Bloop might overhear us. We've sworn never to do anything, directly or indirectly, that would let the Bloops know we're smarter than they are. We've all taken that oath, Terry. Remember?"

"I remember," Terry said, a

little sullenly. "I'm just not very religious—"

"Look," broke in the spaniel, lowering himself on his front legs. "It doesn't matter especially whether you call it religion or not. I'm not even sure that Amenhabi—" the tails wagged, once right, once left—"thought of it as religion. He probably considered it just a practical matter. He just happened to discover accidentally that if he trailed after a Bloop and licked his hand and acted dumb and worshipful, the Bloop would take him into his house, give him a place to sleep and feed him."

**H**E shrugged. "Amenhabi realized right away that the whole setup would be ruined if he did anything to show he was smarter than the Bloop. That's why he made his offspring swear never to talk in front of a Bloop, and that's why we've been taking the same oath ever since. I think it must have been many years later that some of us started making a religion out of it. I prefer to think of it as just common sense—self-preservation."

"You bet," said the setter, a gleam in his eyes. "Don't think I haven't wanted to sound off to my Bloop lots of times. When he makes me chase that rubber ball till my tongue is hanging down to my pasterns . . . but I don't let

out a yap. I run and get the damn ball and bring it back, and bark like I'm crazy happy. You know why? Because I know if I said anything, I'd be out on my tail in a minute, scrabbling for my food in garbage cans instead of getting it served up to me."

"I think it's a tribute to all Edorians, the way we've played dumb all these thousands of years," said the collie sonorously. "The Bloops have completely lost record of the fact that we Edorians used to talk before Amenhabi's time."

"Yeah," said the spaniel. "Except for those jokes the Bloops sometimes tell about 'talking dogs.' There must be some kind of vague tradition . . ."

"It gives me the willies every time I hear one of those jokes," said the setter.

"I've never gotten used to that word 'dog'," said the collie irritably. "We're Edorians. Why do they all say 'dog'? It sounds so flippant—insulting."

"Maybe it's the same thing as our calling them Bloops," Terry said mildly. "Maybe that would sound insulting to them."

"You're always seeing the Bloops' side of it," growled the spaniel.

Terry shook his head. "Not always. If you think I'm a Bloop-lover, you're mistaken. I'm making an exception only for Miss Har-

rington. I just can't go on fooling her . . . I want her to know I can talk and understand her. That's all. I'll get her to promise not to tell any other Bloop—"

"Listen to that!" hooted the setter. "Did you ever know a Bloop to keep a secret about us? Any little thing we do, they're all yapping to each other about it in a minute."

"I know, I know," Terry said. "But Miss Harrington is different."

"Hah!" said the collie nastily. "You haven't gone native, by any chance?"

Terry sprang up on all fours, teeth bared. "What do you mean by that!"

The collie narrowed his eyes suggestively. "You and the Bloop aren't perhaps—?"

**T**ERRY gave a furious yelp and leaped. The collie sprang back, but not fast enough. Terry landed against his side, teeth jabbing into the collie's neck just below the crest. The collie was very shaggy. Terry bit hard to get through to the skin, and his mouth was stuffed with hair. The collie whirled his shoulders powerfully. Terry's tight little body swung around like a pennant. He bit hard on the collie's hair, but he couldn't hold his grip. It gave way. He went flying through the grass.

"Stay away from me, you runt, or I'll kill you!" the collie snarled.

"Stop it, fellows, stop it!" the setter cried, running around aimlessly.

"Let them fight it out," said the spaniel. "That terrier can use a good pasting."

Terry came charging back through the grass. The collie, who weighed almost three times as much as Terry, waited tensely, his legs splayed, his long muzzle pushed forward, his teeth flashing. Terry feinted at his throat, dodged as the collie's jaws darted at him, swung around to the collie's side and dove at the left hind leg, clamping his teeth just above the hock.

The collie's whole body stiffened. His howl of pain seemed to run from his tail to his throat. "Let go—I'll kill you!" he gasped. He writhed and twisted in a tortured circle, desperately nosing for a bite at his little tormentor. But Terry nimbly stayed out of biting-range, grinding on the sensitive tendons at the back of the leg.

"All right," the collie whimpered finally. "I take it back."

Terry slowly unclamped his teeth. "Okay—I'll call it quits," he panted. "But I don't want to hear any remarks like that again! I don't have to take that from anybody!" He glared at the other three dogs. "Just for your information, Miss Harrington has a he-Bloop calling on her and they're going to get married soon,

so you can see there's nothing personal between me and Miss Harrington."

"Let's skip it," said the spaniel, tiredly. "What I want to get straight with Terry is that he mustn't say anything to that Bloop—"

"Shhh!" The setter jerked upright nervously. "Here come some Bloops."

Two young women, one in a green dress and one in a brown dress, came toward them across the grassy lot.

"**D**AMN them," whispered the spaniel. "Always breaking up a conversation." He wrinkled his lips wryly and began to bark—"Whoof! Whoof! Whoof!"

"Arf! Arf! Arf!" barked the setter, pretending he had fleas behind his right ear and slapping at it with his paw.

"Browr! Browr!" barked Terry, acting as if he were aroused by the cat looking out the window of a house across the street.

"Owee!" barked the collie sullenly, lying down and putting his head between his paws.

The two women walked close. "Sounds like a symphony," said Green Dress, and Brown Dress's laugh tinkled over them.

Brown Dress stopped near the spaniel. "Why, this is the Stantons' dog," she said. She bent down. "Isn't it cute?" she said,

scratching him daintily on the skull. The spaniel mechanically pushed his muzzle up into her hand and licked her palm. "Isn't it cute?" cooed Brown Dress.

"Better be careful," said Green Dress. "The mutt doesn't look very clean."

"Of course it's clean. Aren't you?" Brown Dress said to the spaniel, her fingers scratching along his back. The spaniel squirmed around until he got her hand directly behind his withers, and then he pushed up against her fingers and rubbed luxuriously.

The other dogs stopped what they were doing and watched him. Brown Dress glanced around.

"Look at their faces!" she exclaimed. "Don't they look exactly like people?"

"Arf! Arf!" barked the setter nervously, looking away and pawing in the dirt.

"Growr!" said Terry uneasily, eying the cat across the street.

The spaniel humped up his back to get a final scratch from the woman's fingers, then abruptly became interested in a flying milkweed and took off across the grass.

"Let's go," said Green Dress, "before we get fleas." The two women walked away toward the pavement.

Panting, the spaniel came back and sat down. "I've been hoping for hours to get some Bloop to

scratch that place I can't reach. Sure felt good." He suddenly glowered at Terry. "You see the point? If that Bloop knew I have more brains than she does, do you think she'd stop to scratch my back?"

"You don't have to keep harping on the same thing," Terry said testily. "I admit you're right. But, darn it, Miss Harrington is a special case. I just don't have the heart to keep fooling her—"

"Why? For gosh sakes, why?"

"Because she's been very kind to me," Terry said.

"Oh, you soft-headed—"

"Two months ago, when I was sick, she took such care of me—got up at night to fill my water dish—got the best doctor she could get. She took better care of me than if I were a Bloop."

"So what?" yelped the spaniel. "Doesn't she get paid back? Don't you lick her hand? Don't you look worshipfully at her? Don't you come running the instant she pipes up? Don't you bark when she comes home and jump all around her as if she were the only Bloop in the world?"

"Yes, but—"

"So why shouldn't she take care of you better than she would a Bloop? What Bloop would give her all that devotion?"

"Miss Harrington would take care of me even if I didn't put on an act," Terry said firmly. "That's absolutely all I want to

say on the subject. My mind's made up. Now, if you fellows will excuse me—"

He set off across the lot toward the pavement, looking determined.

The other three dogs stared after him in horror.

"He's going to do it!" the setter cried.

"We've got to stop him," the spaniel gritted. "Let's go!"

The three dogs rushed through the grass, the collie limping slightly because of the aching tendon in his left hind leg. They caught up with Terry just as he was turning the corner toward the two-story, buff brick, tile-roofed house where he lived with Miss Harrington. They swerved around in front of him and stopped, facing him, not saying anything.

"Leave me alone, fellows," Terry said tightly, but not very loudly because he was too close to the houses.

"Come on back to the lot—we want to talk to you," the spaniel said.

"I don't want to talk any more," Terry growled. "Get out of my way, please."

"Take him, fellows," the spaniel said softly.

**T**HE three dogs leaped at Terry simultaneously. Their combined weight of 120 pounds hit Terry's 18 pounds, knocking him

flat on his belly. He squirmed furiously under them. The three dogs craftily eased off him, let him get to his feet, then pressed around him. They nipped him, shouldered him, pawed him, forced him back around the corner, back toward the vacant lot. Terry snapped wildly at them, getting a bit of hair, a bit of skin. He ducked his head suddenly and made a diving rush through them. The spaniel's jaws snapped on Terry's right hind leg and held on. The other two dogs bit into the hair on both flanks. Terry was a writhing fluff of fur between them as they struggled across the pavement and into the grass.

"The packing box!" the spaniel panted.

It was a wooden box, about four feet high, that had been lying at one end of the lot for more than a year. One side of it was slightly pried loose, and the dogs often hid inside when they wanted to escape the ball-chasing games people were always trying to inveigle them into.

The three dogs wrestled Terry across the field and, after a wild tangle near the box, jammed him in through the narrow opening. Terry rolled sideways on the rough floor and lay there, gasping. Outside the opening, the other three dogs leaned against each other, puffing and shaking.

"We've—we've saved all Edo-

rians—from a—terrible fate," panted the collie.

"We—sure—have," panted the setter.

A minute later, the setter said doubtfully: "What are we going to do with him?"

The spaniel shrugged. "Keep him here till he comes to his senses."

The setter looked across the field at the long shadows of the late afternoon sun. "Okay—but I'll have to leave you soon. It's getting close to my dinner time."

"We're all in this together," the spaniel said grimly. "We're staying here—all of us."

"But how long can we keep it up?" the setter whined. "We've got to eat sometime. Besides, my Bloops will come looking for me, and I couldn't refuse to go with them—it would upset them."

"Same here," the collie said. "Soon as they miss me a couple of hours, my Bloops get lonesome and come after me."

The spaniel looked at them bitterly. "All right, you damn Bloop-lovers. We'll have to get hold of some Edorians with a little guts. Setter, you take a run down to the waterfront and pick up three or four mongrels. Tell them—"

"Not me!" The setter shook his tousled black head vigorously. "Go down to that tough neighborhood by myself? You think I'm crazy?"

"Just tell them about the emerg-



ency. They'll want to help."

"Yeah, sure. They'd have my ears and two front legs chewed off before I could open my mouth."

**T**ERRY'S muzzle poked weakly through the opening in the box. "Say, fellows, let's quit this kidding—I really have to go. Miss Harrington—"

"Get back!" the spaniel snarled, baring his teeth. Terry retreated.

The spaniel turned to the collie. "Okay," he said. "Friend setter here is scared of his own tail—you'll have to go to the waterfront."

"All the way down there?" the collie buffed. "Why don't you go yourself, since it's your idea? I never travel down that way."

"And leave you here to guard the terrier?" the spaniel said skeptically. "After he just handed you a royal lacing?"

"What lacing! He just got hold of me where I couldn't reach him, the little stinker. But he can't get out of this box with me standing here, you can count on that."

The spaniel looked uncertainly at him. "Okay," he said finally. "Guard him with your life." He loped away through the grass, onto the pavement, and out of sight around the corner.

Terry pushed his nose through the opening again. "Listen, fellows, if you'll just turn your backs for a minute, I'll make it worth your

while. I'll bring around some steak—Miss Harrington always buys the best steaks—"

"Get back!" The setter jabbed at him, nipping the tip of Terry's nose.

Terry withdrew again. Pinned in as he was, he couldn't maneuver, couldn't use his only effective tactic against superior weight—speed. He nosed around the sides of the box, but the boards were all nailed securely. He lay down miserably on his belly. If he could only have gotten word to Miss Harrington and spared her worry, the situation wouldn't have bothered him so much. He knew that right at that moment she must be looking anxiously out the window, and soon she would be walking around outside, nervously hunting for him. If the other Edorians could only understand how good-hearted she was . . .

**G**RADUALLY the inside of the box darkened. Evening was creeping in ominously. In a little while, the spaniel would be back with the waterfront toughs—

Terry stood up and desperately looked around. The big dark bulk of the collie and the setter still blocked his escape. But their voices sounded somehow different than before. Terry nosed quickly to the opening.

"You stay here," the collie was saying softly. "I'll only be a min-

ute—I'll be right back."

"I saw her first," the setter said. "You stay here."

"Ah, you little runt, she wouldn't pay any attention to you! I'm going—be right back."

"No, you don't!" the setter yapped. "I saw her first."

Terry pushed his head out through the opening. The collie and the setter were racing across the field toward a female cocker spaniel who was dawdling along the sidewalk.

In an instant Terry was out of the box. He streaked across the field in the opposite direction. He ran into the alley behind the houses, dodged three low-hanging clothes-lines, climbed under the iron fence behind Miss Harrington's place, ran across the lawn, down through the open cellar window, and up the stairs into the living room.

He stopped, panting.

Miss Harrington was there. But she looked very strange. She was sitting on the chair, eyes half closed, not saying anything. Her pale brown hair was slightly mussed. On the coffee table near her knees was a small tan bottle with a gaudy label, and a glass. The bottle was almost empty.

"You!" Miss Harrington finally said. Her head weaved slightly.

Terry's heart thumped in panic. She was sick. She was very sick.

"You . . . stay out all hours—"

Miss Harrington's soft voice was blurred—"come in any old time you please . . . you think I'll be glad to see you!" She picked up the glass, closed her eyes and took a long drink. She put the glass down, and her whole face wrinkled up. Terry looked at her frantically. She had never behaved like this before. That bottle had stood untouched in the closet ever since he could remember.

Her long eyelashes moved apart. "Just like all the other males," she said shakily. "You and Roger. Think you can go off somewhere and not say a word . . . not even phone . . . come back any time you darn please." She took a deep, shaky breath. "I'll show you. All of you. Let the phone ring. Just let it ring. Think I'll answer it? It can ring from now till doomsday. Ring and ring. Rrrrrring!" She raised a hand and fluttered it like a bird at the telephone.

Then she picked up the glass again, and this time she emptied it.

She put the glass down, picked up the bottle with both hands and shakily poured more of the tan fluid into the glass.

**T**ERRY clamped his teeth together and tightened his whole body to stifle the tremor in his chest.

He spoke:

"Please don't drink any more."

"Mind your own business," said Miss Harrington.

She put the bottle down and reached for the glass. Her hand stopped midway.

"Who said that?" she choked.

Terry spoke gently. "I said it. Terry."

Miss Harrington clapped her hand across her mouth and looked at him with huge eyes.

"No," she said hoarsely through her fingers. "No."

"Please don't be frightened," Terry said.

Miss Harrington closed her eyes tightly. She lifted the glass and took a long drink. She put the glass down and slowly opened her eyes again.

"I've always been able to talk," Terry said. "I've had to hide it from you."

The fright went out of her face. Her lips wrinkled. "You think I'm crazy?" she said. "You think I think I'm hearing something? You think I don't know I'm drunk?"

"But I *am* talking," Terry said anxiously. "I really am. All dogs can talk. I want *you* to know it—but please don't tell anybody else. Dogs are actually smarter than people."

Miss Harrington suddenly began to laugh. Shrilly, triumphantly. "The first time I've ever really been drunk! It's wonderful! Wonderful!" She stood up unsteadily and spread her arms wide. "I don't

care about anything! I'm stewed. I'm stewed to the gills. Nothing can bother me! Nothing. Go ahead—talk! Talking dogs. Flying cats. Wheeeee!"

She moved away from the chair, her arms outstretched. "I'm a bird!" she sang out. "I can fly. Wheeeee!"

"Miss Harrington—you'll get hurt!" Terry cried.

"Nothing can hurt me. I'm feeling no pain. I'm a bird. A bi-i-ird!"

"Oh, please sit down," Terry wailed. "You'll get hurt."

"Shut up—you worry too much!" She floated around the room on tiptoe. "Get out of my way, you—you talking dog!"

Terry scampered out of the path of her high-heeled pumps. "Please—please listen to me. I've been wanting to tell you for years. All dogs can talk. Dogs are smarter than people."

"Sure they are," she mumbled. "Goldfish are smarter than people. Everything's smarter than people."

"No, *nó*," Terry said desperately. "Just dogs—"

She rounded the coffee table and sat down with a bump on the sofa. "Whoool!" she said.

Slowly her arms drooped to her sides. Her eyelids drooped. She fell face down, *plop!* on the sofa. Fast asleep in an instant . . .

Terry thought, Well, now she knows! And he went out to the kitchen to eat supper.



**N**EXT morning, Miss Harrington was awake before Terry was. He stirred on his mat when he heard her sloshing in the shower. He jumped up and ran out into the hall to wait for her. She came out of the bathroom, looking haggard and hurried. She walked quickly past him and down the stairs. In a moment, she was bustling in the kitchen. When Terry came in, she already had dumped a can of dog food into his tray.

Before Terry could figure out the best way to resume the unsatisfactory conversation of the evening before, Miss Harrington was out the door, running down the street for the bus. He watched her from the window. It was just as well, he thought—this rushed moment was no time to take up such a matter. Better to wait until she came home from work and they could sit down, quiet and relaxed. Meanwhile, he'd have time to prepare a more orderly presentation than his haphazard first attempt . . .

But when she came home, and he went running to the door, barking and wagging his tail in regulation fashion, he found that Miss Harrington wasn't alone. The tall, black-haired, thick-eyebrowed man named Roger was with her. They both looked very chipper. Miss Harrington stooped and grasped Terry's paws and roughed

him up gaily and tweaked his ears and called him "you terrycloth cutie," the way she always did when she was feeling good.

Then she stood up and took Roger's hand and led him into the living room. His thick black eyebrows rose when he saw the bottle and the glass on the coffee table.

"Yes—you drove me to drink," Miss Harrington said half-defiantly, half-humorously.

"You little brown-eyed idiot," Roger said laughing. "Couldn't you possibly imagine I might have been sent out of town?" He threw his arms around her waist, pulled her close, and started in on a determined kiss.

Terry ran around them, barking, the way he knew he was expected to do when anybody laid a hand on Miss Harrington.

Miss Harrington giggled. "He'll get used to you."

"Yes, but the question is, will I get used to him? Because I'm marrying you, do I have to marry the dog, too?"

Miss Harrington led Roger to the sofa. "He's a very smart dog," she said. "You'll love him."

"What's so smart about him?"

"Just look at him," she said proudly. "Can't you see the intelligence in his face? After you've been around him a while, you'll get the feeling he understands everything you say. Really, I think

in some ways dogs are smarter than people.”

Terry stiffened in horror.

She was *telling* this he-Bloop!

“What makes you say that?” Roger said.

“Oh, I don’t know. I just have the feeling—I can’t exactly explain it. But I think the only thing they can’t do is ta . . .”

She stopped, her lips apart. Her eyes grew big and round and haunted.

“Do you know what?” she exclaimed. “Last night, when I was drunk, I actually thought the dog was talking!”

Terry swayed in agony. She was telling him. She couldn’t keep a secret. The other Edorians were right. She would tell this Bloop everything . . . and soon the whole world would know.

“Talking dogs, eh?” Roger said.

“Just shows you how smart I think he is,” Miss Harrington said.

“Okay, he’s smart,” Roger said.

“He’s a genius. I’m going to give him a chance to prove it. From now on—that is, as soon as I become the head of this house—this mutt starts earning his keep. If he’s as smart as you say, he’s smart enough to learn how to bring in the paper in the morning. And the mail. We can train him to meet the postman. And why can’t you stick a shopping basket between his teeth and put your grocery list in it and send him down

to the store and have the grocer fill your order?”

“But, Roger, we can’t—”

“I never could see this business of using your hard-earned pay to support a dog in idleness,” Roger said. “It’s a racket. Why shouldn’t the mutt work his way, same as I do? I don’t see why he can’t dig up worms for me when I go fishing. Dogs are digging all the time anyway—might as well have something useful to dig for. And I think I’ll show him the way to my tobacco shop—he can bring me pipe tobacco when I run out. And when we have a kid, we can hitch the mutt up to a little wagon and . . .”

**W**HEN Terry goes trotting down the street with a market basket between his teeth, the other dogs of the neighborhood almost always stop what they are doing and line up to watch him. They bring their puppies out, too. He is a perfect illustration of the hazards of violating, or even thinking of violating, the oath all dogs take.

“Does that hand me a laugh!” some of the dogs say.

“Poetic justice, that’s what it is,” comment others.

Except, of course, if there are any Bloops around.

