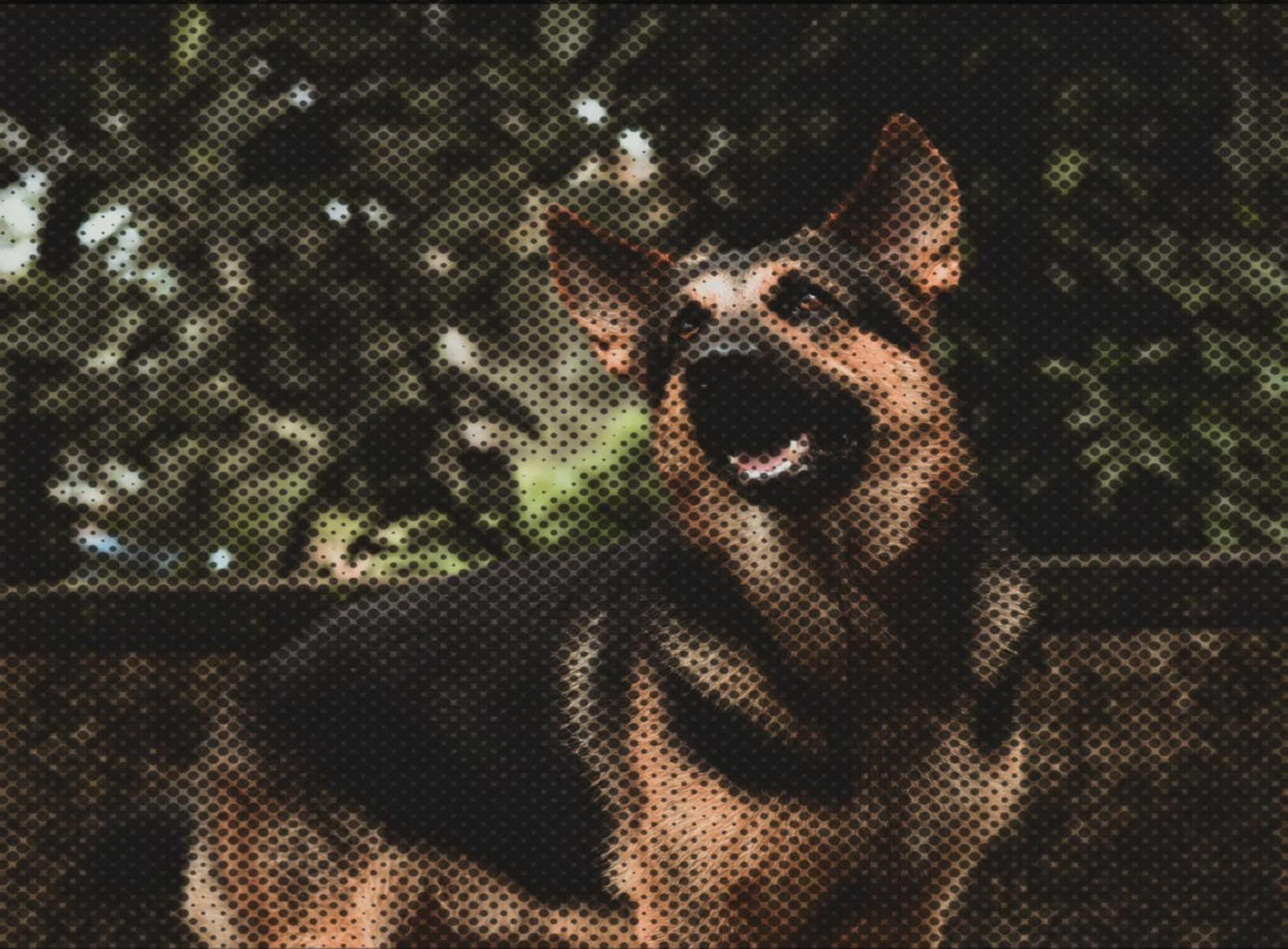


**Charles George Douglas
Roberts**



Jim

Charles George Douglas Roberts

Jim

The story of a backwoods police dog



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I. HOW WOOLLY BILLY CAME TO BRINE'S RIP

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Jim's mother was a big cross-bred bitch, half Newfoundland and half bloodhound, belonging to Black Saunders, one of the hands at the Brine's Rip Mills. As the mills were always busy, Saunders was always busy, and it was no place for a dog to be around, among the screeching saws, the thumping, wet logs, and the spurting sawdust. So the big bitch, with fiery energy thrilling her veins and sinews and the restraint of a master's hand seldom exercised upon her, practically ran wild.

Hunting on her own account in the deep wilderness which surrounded Brine's Rip Settlement, she became a deadly menace to every wild thing less formidable than a bear 10 or a bull moose, till at last, in the early prime of her adventurous career, she was shot by an angry game warden for her depredations among the deer and the young caribou.

Jim's father was a splendid and pedigreed specimen of the old English sheep-dog. From a litter of puppies of this uncommon parentage, Tug Blackstock, the Deputy Sheriff of Nipswaska County, chose out the one that seemed to him the likeliest, paid Black Saunders a sovereign for him, and named him Jim. To Tug Blackstock, for some unfathomed reason, the name of "Jim" stood for self-contained efficiency.

It was efficiency, in chief, that Tug Blackstock, as Deputy Sheriff, was after. He had been reading, in a stray magazine with torn cover and much-thumbed pages, an account of the wonderful doings of the trained police dogs of Paris. The story had fired his imagination and excited his envy.

There was a lawless element in some of the outlying corners of Nipsiwaska County, with a larger element of yet more audacious lawlessness beyond the county line from which to recruit. Throughout the wide and mostly wilderness expanse of Nipsiwaska County the responsibility for law and order rested almost 11 solely upon the shoulders of Tug Blackstock. His chief, the Sheriff, a prosperous shopkeeper who owed his appointment to his political pull, knew little and thought less of the duties of his office.

As soon as Jim was old enough to have an interest beyond his breakfast and the worrying of his rag ball, Tug Blackstock set about his training. It was a matter that could not be hurried. Tug had much work to do and Jim, as behaved a growing puppy, had a deal of play to get through in the course of each twenty-four hours. Then so hard was the learning, so easy, alas! the forgetting. Tug Blackstock was kind to all creatures but timber thieves and other evil-doers of like kidney. He was patient, with the long patience of the forest. But he had a will like the granite of old Bald Face.

Jim was quick of wit, willing to learn, intent to please his master. But it was hard for him to concentrate. It was hard to keep his mind off cats, and squirrels, the worrying of old boots, and other doggish frivolities. Hence, at times, some painful misunderstandings between teacher and pupil. In

the main, however, the education of Jim progressed to a marvel.

They were a pair, indeed, to strike the most stolid imagination, let alone the sensitive, brooding, watchful imagination of the backwoods. Tug Blackstock was a tall, spare figure of a man, narrow of hip, deep of chest, with something of a stoop to his mighty shoulders, and his head thrust forward as if in ceaseless scrutiny of the unseen. His hair, worn somewhat short and pushed straight back, was faintly grizzled. His face, tanned and lean, was markedly wide at the eyes, with a big, well-modelled nose, a long, obstinate jaw, and a wide mouth whimsically uptwisted at one corner.

Except on the trail—and even then he usually carried a razor in his pack—he was always clean-shaven, just because he didn't like the curl of his beard. His jacket, shirt, and trousers were of brownish-grey homespun, of much the same hue as his soft slouch hat, all as inconspicuous as possible. But at his throat, loosely knotted under his wide-rolling shirt collar, he wore usually an ample silk handkerchief of vivid green spattered with big yellow spots, like dandelions in a young June meadow.

As for Jim, at first glance he might almost have been taken for a slim, young black bear cub rather than a dog. The shaggy coat bequeathed to him by his sheep-dog sire gave to his legs and to his hindquarters an appearance of massiveness that was almost clumsy. But under this dense black fleece his lines were fine and clean-drawn as a bull-terrier's.

The hair about his eyes grew so long and thick that, if left to itself, it would have seriously interfered with his vision. This his master could not think of permitting, so the riotous hair was trimmed down severely, till Jim's large, sagacious eyes gazed out unimpeded from ferocious, brush-like rims of stubby fur about half an inch in length.



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For some ten miles above the long, white, furrowed face of Brine's Rip, where Blue Forks Brook flows in, the main stream of the Ottanoosis is a succession of mad rapids and toothed ledges and treacherous, channel-splitting shoals. These ten miles are a trial of nerve and water-craft for the best canoeists on the river. In the spring, when the river was in freshet and the freed logs were racing, battering, and jamming, the whole reach was such a death-trap for the stream-drivers that 14 it had come to be known as Dead Man's Run.

Now, in high summer, when the stream was shrunken in its channel and the sunshine lay golden over the roaring, creamy chutes and the dancing shallows, the place looked less perilous. But it was full of snares and hidden teeth. It was no place for the canoeist, however expert with pole and paddle, unless he knew how to read the water unerringly for many yards ahead. It is this reading of the water, this instantaneous solving of the hieroglyphics of foam and surge and swirl and glassy lunge, that makes the skilled runner of the rapids.

A light birch-bark canoe, with a man in the stern and a small child in the bow, was approaching the head of the rapids, which were hidden from the paddler's view by a high, densely-wooded bend of the shore. The canoe leapt forward swiftly on the smooth, quiet current, under the strong drive of the paddle.

The paddler was a tall, big-limbed man, with fair hair fringing out under his tweed cap, and a face burnt red rather than tanned by the weather. He was dressed roughly but well, and not as a woodsman, and he had a subtle air of being foreign to the backwoods. He knew how to handle his paddle, however, the 15 prow of his craft keeping true though his strokes were slow and powerful.

The child who sat facing him on a cushion in the bow was a little boy of four or five years, in a short scarlet jacket and blue knickers. His fat, bare legs were covered with fly-bites and scratches, his baby face of the tenderest cream and pink, his round, interested eyes as blue as periwinkle blossoms. But the most conspicuous thing about him was his hair. He was bareheaded—his little cap lying in the bottom of the canoe among the luggage—and the hair, as white as tow, stood out like a fleece all over his head, enmeshing the sunlight in its silken tangle.

When the canoe shot round the bend, the roar of the rapids smote suddenly upon the voyagers' ears. The child turned his bright head inquiringly, but from his low place could see nothing to explain the noise. His father, however, sitting up on the hinder bar of the canoe, could see a menacing white line of tossing crests, aflash in the sunlight, stretching from shore to shore. Backing water vigorously to

check his headway, he stood up to get a better view and choose his way through the surge.

The stranger was master of his paddle, but 16 he had had no adequate experience in running rapids. Such light and unobstructed rips as he had gone through had merely sufficed to make him regard lightly the menace confronting him. He had heard of the perils of Dead Man's Run, but that, of course, meant in time of freshet, when even the mildest streams are liable to go mad and run amuck. This was the season of dead low water, and it was hard for him to imagine there could be anything really to fear from this lively but shrunken stream. He was strong, clear-eyed, steady of nerve, and he anticipated no great trouble in getting through.

As the light craft dipped into the turmoil, jumping as if buffeted from below, and the wave-tops slapped in on either side of the bow, the little lad gave a cry of fear.

"Sit tight, boy. Don't be afraid," said the father, peering ahead with intent, narrowed eyes and surging fiercely on his blade to avoid a boiling rock just below the first chute. As he swept past in safety he laughed in triumph, for the passage had been close and exciting, and the conquest of a mad rapid is one of the thrilling things in life, and worth going far for. His laugh reassured the child, who laughed also, but cowered low in the canoe and 17 stared over the gunwale with wide eyes of awe.

But already the canoe was darting down toward a line of black rocks smothered in foam. The man paddled desperately to gain the other shore, where there seemed to be a clear passage. Slanting sharply across the great

current, surging with short, terrific strokes upon his sturdy maple blade, his teeth set and his breath coming in grunts, he was swept on downward, sideways toward the rocks, with appalling speed. But he made the passage, swept the bow around, and raced through, shaving the rock so narrowly that his heart paused and the sweat jumped out suddenly cold on his forehead.

Immediately afterwards the current swept him to mid-stream. Just here the channel was straight and clear of rocks, and though the rips were heavy the man had a few minutes' respite, with little to do but hold his course.

With a stab at the heart he realized now into what peril he had brought his baby. Eagerly he looked for a chance to land, but on neither side could he make shore with any chance of escaping shipwreck. A woodsman, expert with the canoe-pole, might have managed it, but the stranger had neither pole nor 18 skill to handle one. He was in the grip of the wild current and could only race on, trusting to master each new emergency as it should hurl itself upon him.

Presently the little one took alarm again at his father's stern-set mouth and preoccupied eyes. The man had just time to shout once more, "Don't be afraid, son. Dad'll take care of you," when the canoe was once more in a yelling chaos of chutes and ledges. And now there was no respite. Unable to read the signs of the water, he was full upon each new peril before he recognized it, and only his great muscular strength and instant decision saved them.

Again and again they barely by a hair's-breadth, slipped through the jaws of death, and it seemed to the man that the gnashing ledges raved and yelled behind him at each

miracle of escape. Then hissing wave-crests cut themselves off and leapt over the racing gunwale, till he feared the canoe would be swamped. Once they scraped so savagely that he thought the bottom was surely ripped from the canoe. But still he won onward, mile after roaring mile, his will fighting doggedly to keep his eyesight from growing hopelessly confused with the hellish, sliding dazzle and riot of waters.

But at last the fiend of the flood, having played with its prey long enough, laid bare its claws and struck. The bow of the canoe, in swerving from one foam-curtained rock, grounded heavily upon another. In an instant the little craft was swung broadside on, and hung there. The waves piled upon her in a yelling pack. She was smothered down, and rolled over helplessly.

As they shot out into the torrent the man, with a terrible cry, sprang toward the bow, striving to reach his son. He succeeded in catching the little one, with one hand, by the back of the scarlet jacket. The next moment he went under and the jacket came off over the child's head. A whimsical cross-current dragged the little boy twenty feet off to one side, and shot him into a shallow side channel.

When the man came to the surface again his eyes were shut, his face stark white, his legs and arms flung about aimlessly as weeds; but fast in his unconscious grip he held the little red jacket. The canoe, its side stove in, and full of water, was hurrying off down the rapid amid a fleet of paddles, cushions, blankets, boxes, and bundles. The body of the man, heavy and inert and sprawling, followed more slowly. The waves rolled it over and 20 trampled it down,

shouldered it up again, and snatched it away viciously whenever it showed an inclination to hang itself up on some projecting ledge. It was long since they had had such a victim on whom to glut their rancour.

The child, meanwhile, after being rolled through the laughing shallows of the side channel and playfully buffeted into a half-drowned unconsciousness, was stranded on a sand spit some eight or ten yards from the right-hand shore. There he lay, half in the water, half out of it, the silken white floss of his hair all plastered down to his head, the rippled current tugging at his scratched and bitten legs.

The unclouded sun shone down warmly upon his face, slowly bringing back the rose to his baby lips, and a small, paper-blue butterfly hovered over his head for a few seconds, as if puzzled to make out what kind of being he was.

The sand spit which had given the helpless little one refuge was close to the shore, but separated from it by a deep and turbulent current. A few minutes after the blue butterfly had flickered away across the foam, a large black bear came noiselessly forth from the fir woods and down to the water's edge. He gazed searchingly up and down the river to see if there were any other human creatures in sight, then stretched his savage black muzzle out over the water toward the sand spit, eyeing and sniffing at the little unconscious figure there in the sun. He could not make out whether it was dead or only asleep. In either case he wanted it. He stepped into the foaming edge of the sluice, and stood there whimpering with disappointed appetite, daunted by the snaky vehemence of the current.

Presently, as the warmth of the flooding sun crept into his veins, the child stirred, and opened his blue eyes. He sat up, noticed he was sitting in the water, crawled to a dry spot, and snuggled down into the hot sand. For the moment he was too dazed to realize where he was. Then, as the life pulsed back into his veins, he remembered how his father's hand had caught him by the jacket just as he went plunging into the awful waves. Now, the jacket was gone. His father was gone, too.

"Daddy! Daddee-ee!" he wailed. And at the sound of that wailing cry, so unmistakably the cry of a youngling for its parent, the bear drew back discreetly behind a bush, and glanced uneasily up and down the stream to see if the parent would come in answer to the appeal. He had a wholesome respect for the grown-up man creature of either sex, and was ready to retire on the approach of one.

But no one came. The child began to sob softly, in a lonesome, frightened, suppressed way. In a minute or two, however, he stopped this, and rose to his feet, and began repeating over and over the shrill wail of "Daddy, Dad-dee-ee, Daddee-ee!" At the same time he peered about him in every direction, almost hopefully, as if he thought his father must be hiding somewhere near, to jump out presently for a game of bo-peep with him.

His baby eyes were keen. They did not find his father, but they found the bear, its great black head staring at him from behind a bush.

His cries stopped on the instant, in the middle of a syllable, frozen in his throat with terror. He cowered down again upon the sand, and stared, speechless, at the awful

apparition. The bear, realizing that the little one's cries had brought no succour, came out from its hiding confidently, and down to the shore, and straight out into the water till the current began to drag too savagely at its legs. Here it stopped, grumbling and baffled.

The little one, unable any longer to endure the dreadful sight, backed to the extreme edge of the sand, covered his face with his hands, and fell to whimpering piteously, an unceasing, hopeless, monotonous little cry, as vague and inarticulate as the wind.

The bear, convinced at length that the sluice just here was too strong for him to cross, drew back to the shore reluctantly. It moved slowly up-stream some forty or fifty yards, looking for a feasible crossing. Disappointed in this direction, it then explored the water's edge for a little distance down-stream, but with a like result. But it would not give up. Up and down, up and down, it continued to patrol the shore with hungry obstinacy. And the piteous whimpering of the little figure that cowered, with hidden face upon the sand spit, gradually died away. That white fleece of silken locks, dried in the sun and blown by the warm breeze, stood out once more in its radiance on the lonely little slumbering head.



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Tug Blackstock sat on a log, smoking and musing, on the shore of that wide, eddying pool, full of slow swirls and spent foam clusters, in which the tumbling riot of Brine's Rip came to a rest. From the mills behind him screeched the

untiring saws. Outstretched at 24 his feet lay Jim, indolently snapping at flies. The men of the village were busy in the mills, the women in their cottages, the children in their schools; and the stretch of rough shore gave Tug Blackstock the solitude which he loved.

Down through the last race of the rapids came a canoe paddle, and began revolving slowly in the eddies. Blackstock pointed it out to Jim, and sent him in after it. The dog swam for it gaily, grabbed it by the top so that it could trail at his side, and brought it to his master's feet. It was a good paddle, of clean bird's-eye maple and Melicite pattern, and Tug Blackstock wondered who could have been so careless as to lose it. Carelessness is a vice regarded with small leniency in the backwoods.

A few minutes later down the rapids came wallowing a water-logged birch-canoe. The other things which had started out with it, the cushions and blankets and bundles, had got themselves tangled in the rocks and left behind.

At sight of the wrecked canoe, Tug Blackstock rose to his feet. He began to suspect another of the tragedies of Dead Man's Run. But what river-man would come to grief in the Run at this stage of the water? Blackstock 25 turned to an old dug-out which lay hauled up on the shore, ran it down into the water and paddled out to salvage the wrecked canoe. He towed it to shore, emptied it, and scrutinized it. He thought he knew every canoe on the river, but this one was a stranger to him. It had evidently been brought across the Portage from the east coast. Then he found, burnt into the inside of the gunwale near the bow, the letters J. C. M. W.