

***ALBERT PAYSON
TERHUNE***



***LAD
OF SUNNYBANK***

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Lad of Sunnybank

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[1 THE WHISPERER](#)

[2 THE GUEST](#)

[3 THE VARMINT](#)

[4 OLD MAN TROUBLE](#)

[5 CHANGELINGS](#)

[6 THE RINGER](#)

[7 LAD AND LOHENGRIN](#)

[8 DOG DAYS](#)

[9 "HOW'S ZAT?"](#)

[10 "OUT OF THE DEPTHS"](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

Lad of Sunnybank

1

THE WHISPERER

Table of Contents

Down the winding and oak-shaded furlong of driveway between Sunnybank House and the main road trotted the huge mahogany-and-snow collie. He was mighty of chest and shoulder, heavy of coat, and with deep-set dark eyes in whose depths lurked a Soul.

Sunnybank Lad was returning home after a galloping hunt for rabbits in the forests beyond The Place.

On the veranda of the gray old house sat the Mistress and the Master, at the end of the day's work. At the Mistress's feet, as always, lay Wolf, the fiery little son of Lad. Gigantic Bruce—dog without a flaw—sprawled asleep near him. Behind the Master's chair snoozed Bruce's big young auburn son, Bobbie.

Ordinarily these collies would have fared forth with their king, Lad, on his rabbit hunt. But, this afternoon, one and all of them had been through the dreaded ordeal of a scrubbing at the hands of Robert Friend, The Place's English superintendent, and one of the other men.

Lad had recognized the preparations for this loathly flea-destroying scrub and had seen the disinfectant mixed in the bath-barrel. So he trotted off, alone, to the woods, unseen by the other dogs or by the men.

Lad loved his swims in the lake at the foot of the oak-starred lawn. But he abhorred the evil-smelling barrel-dip—a dip designed to free him of the fleas which begin to infest every outdoor long-haired dog with the full advent of spring.

When the Master chanced to be at hand to supervise the dipping, Lad remained, always, martyr-like, to take his own share of the ordeal. But today the Master had been shut up in his study all afternoon. Lad ever refused to recognize any authority save only his and the Mistress's. Wherefore his truant excursion to the woods.

Wolf glanced up from his drowse before Lad had traveled halfway down the driveway, on his homeward journey. Wolf was The Place's official watchdog. Asleep or awake, his senses were keen. It was he that had heard or scented his returning sire before any of the rest. The Mistress saw him raise his head from the mat at her feet, and she followed the direction of his inquiring glance.

"Here comes Laddie," she said. "Robert was looking all over for him when he dipped the other dogs. He came and asked me if——"

"Trust Lad to know when dipping-day comes around!" laughed the Master. "Unless you or I happen to be on hand, he always gives the men the slip. He——"

"He's carrying something in his mouth!" interposed the Mistress—"something gray and little and squirmy. Look!"

The great collie had caught sight of his two human deities on the veranda. He changed his trot to a hand gallop. His plumed tail waved gay welcome as he came toward them. Between his powerful jaws he carried with infinite care and tenderness a morsel of tawny-gray fluff which twitched and struggled to get free.

Up to the veranda ran Lad. At the Mistress's feet he deposited gently his squirming burden. Then, his tail

waving, he gazed up at her face, to note her joy in the reception of his gift.

Forever, Lad was bringing things home to the Mistress from his woodland or highroad walks. Once the gift had been an exquisite lace parasol, with an ivory handle made from an antique Chinese sword—a treasure which apparently had fallen from some passing motorcar.

Again, he had deposited at her feet a very dead and very much flattened chicken, run over by some careless motorist and flung into a wayside ditch, whence Lad had recovered it.

Of old, a run-over chicken or dog or cat was all but unknown in the sweet North Jersey hinterland. Horses and horse drivers gave such road-crossers a fair chance to get out of the way; nor did horses approach at such breakneck pace that too often there could be no hope of escape.

Today, throughout that same hinterland, as everywhere else in America—though practically never in Great Britain—pitiful little wayside corpses mark the tearing passage of the twentieth-century juggernaut.

The slain creatures' owners pay for the smooth roads which permit speed to the invading motorists, thus becoming in a measure the motorists' hosts. The intruders reward the hospitality not only by murderously reckless speed, but by stripping roadside woods and dells of their flowering trees—usually leaving the fragrantly beautiful trophies to wilt and die in the cars' tonneaus and then throwing away the worthless trash before reaching their day's destination.

Where once there were miles of flowery dogwood and mountain laurel and field blossoms bordering the roads, there are now desolation and the stumps of wrenched-off branches and uprooted sod, which mingle picturesquely with chicken bones and greasy paper and egg shells and other pretty remnants of motor-picnickers' roadside lunches.

In one or two states an effort has been made to curb reckless driving by erecting white crosses at spots where some luckless pedestrian has been murdered by a speeding car. In these states the motorists have protested vigorously to the courts; begging that the grim reminders be removed, as the constant sight of them mars the fun of a jolly ride.

But nowhere have crosses or other warnings been raised over the death-places of car-smashed livestock; nor to mark the wastes where once bloomed glorious flowers. There would not be enough crosses to go around, if all craftsmen toiled night and day to turn them out.

It used to be said that grass never again grew where Attila, the raiding Hun, had ridden. Attila was a humane and tenderly considerate old chap, compared to the brainless and heartless and speed-delirious driver of a present-day installment-payment car.

Lad had shown deep chagrin when the Mistress recoiled from the long-dead and much-flattened chicken he had brought home to her and when the Master ordered it taken away and buried. Carefully the dog had dug it up again evidently thinking it had been interred by mistake. With wistful affection he had deposited it on the floor close beside the Mistress's chair in the dining-room, and he had

been still more grieved at the dearth of welcome which had greeted its return from the grave.

The Mistress looked with dubious curiosity at today's offering he had just brought her. Even before he laid it down on the floor the other dogs were pressing around in stark excitement. Lad stood over his find, baring his teeth and growling deep down in his furry throat. At such a threat from their acknowledged king, not one of the other collies—not even fiery Wolf—dared to come closer.

The Mistress stooped to touch the grayish creature her chum and worshiper had brought home to her from the forests.

It was a baby raccoon.

Unhurt, but fussily angry and much confused by its new surroundings, was the forest waif. It snarled at the Mistress and sought peevishly to dig its tiny milkteeth into her caressing fingers. Instantly Lad caught it up again, holding it deftly by the nape of its neck, as if to show the Mistress how the feeble infant might be handled without danger of a bite.

As she did not avail herself of the hint, he laid the baby raccoon down again and began solicitously to lick it all over.

How he had chanced upon the creature, back there in the woods, nobody was ever to know. Perhaps its mother had been shot or trapped and the hungry and helpless orphan's plight had touched the big collie's heart—a heart always ridiculously soft toward anything young and defenseless.

In any event, he had brought it home with him and had borne it at once to the Mistress as if begging her protection for it.

“What are we to do with the wretched thing?” demanded the Master. “It—”

“First of all,” suggested the Mistress, “I think we’d better feed it. It looks half starved. I’ll get some warm milk. I wonder if it has learned how to eat.”

It had not. But it learned with almost instant ease, lapping up the milk ravenously and with a tongue which every minute spilled less and swallowed more. Its appetite seemed insatiable. All the while it was eating, Lad stood guard over the saucer, inordinately proud and happy that his forest refugee had been rescued from starvation.

“He’s taken the little fellow under his protection,” said the Mistress. “I suppose that means we must keep the raccoon. At least till it can fend for itself. Then we can turn it loose in the woods again.”

“To be killed by the first pot hunter or the first stray cur that comes along?” queried the Master. “That is the penalty for turning loose woodland creatures that have been tamed. When you tame a wild animal or a wild bird and then let it go free, you’re signing its death warrant. You take away from it the fear that is its only safeguard. No; let’s send it to a zoo as soon as it can live there comfortably. That’s the better solution.”

The Mistress’s gaze roved over the placid sunset lawns, to the fire-blue lake and then to the rolling miles of hills and of springtime forest. She said, half to herself:

“If I had my choice, whether to leave all this for a cramped cage and to spend my life there, behind bars, with people staring at me or poking at me—or to go to sleep forever—I should choose the sleep. It’s pitiful to think of any

forest creature changing its outdoor heritage for a zoo. I hate to visit such places. It always gives me a heartache to see wild things jailed for life, like that.”

“All of which,” growled the Master, “means you’ve made up your mind you want to keep the measly little cuss here, for always. But——”

“Lots of people have told me a tame raccoon makes a wonderful pet,” observed the Mistress, with elaborate dearth of interest. “And I’ve always wanted one, ever so much. So—so, we’ll do exactly whatever you think best.”

“Sheer hypocrisy!” groaned the master. “‘Whatever I think best!’ That means you and Lad have decided to give this forlorn brute a home at The Place. All right. Only, when it eats up all our chickens and then gets killed by the dogs, or when it murders one of our best collies (they say a raccoon is a terrible fighter), don’t blame *me*.”

“If you’d rather we didn’t keep it,” said the Mistress, demurely, as she stroked the fuzzy gray fur of the food-stupefied wisp at her feet, “why, of course, we won’t. You know that ... What shall we call it? I—I think Rameses is a wonderful name for a pet raccoon. Don’t you?”

“Why Rameses?” argued the Master, glumly.

“Why *not* Rameses?” demanded the Mistress, in polite surprise.

“I don’t know the answer,” grouchily admitted the defeated Master. “Rameses it is. Or rather *he* is. I—I think it’s a hideous name, especially for a coon. Let’s hope he’ll die. Lad, next time you go into the woods, I’ll muzzle you. You’ve just let us in for a mort of bother.”

Lad wriggled self-consciously, and stooped again to lick smooth the ruffled fur of Rameses. This time the little raccoon did not resent the attention. Instead, he peered up at his adopters with a queerly shrewd friendliness in his beady black eyes. His comedy mask of a face seemed set in a perpetual grin. The food had done wonders to reconcile him to his new home.

He reared on his short hind legs and clasped Lad's lowered neck with his fuzzy arms, his sharp snout pressed to the collie's ear, as if whispering to him.

The Master snapped his fingers, summoning the other dogs. They had been standing inquisitively at a respectful distance, while the feeding went on, being warned by Lad's growl not to molest his protégé.

Now, at the Master's signal, they pressed again around the newcomer, while Lad looked up at the man in worried appeal.

The Master pointed down at the suddenly pot-bellied baby, attracting the collies' attention to him. Then he said, very slowly and distinctly to them:

"Let him alone! Understand! *Let him* ALONE!"

The Law had been laid down—the simple dictum, "Let him alone!" which every Sunnybank dog had learned to understand and to obey, from earliest puppyhood. Henceforth, there was no danger that any one of that group of collies would harm the intruder.

"Sometimes," said the Master, casually, "I wish we hadn't taught these dogs to obey so well. If one of them happens to forget, and breaks Rameses back, I'll forgive

him.... I hope they all understand that. But I know they don't."

So it was that The Place's population was increased by one tame raccoon, Rameses by name. And so it was that the raccoon's education began.

The Mistress was delighted with the way in which her new pet responded to the simple training she gave him. She "had a way" with animals and was a born trainer. Under her care and tutelage Rameses not only grew with amazing rapidity, but he developed as fast, mentally, as had Lad himself in puppy days. There seemed almost nothing the raccoon wouldn't and couldn't learn—when he chose to.

He had the run of The Place and he obeyed the Mistress's whistle as readily as did any of the dogs. Even the Master conceded, after a time, with some reluctance, that the coon was an engaging pet, except for his habit of being asleep somewhere in a tree top at the very moment his owners wanted to show him off to guests.

The collies, all except Lad, gave somewhat cold reception to Rameses. They did not transgress the Master's command to "let him alone." But they regarded him for the first few months with cold disapproval, and they slunk away when he tried to romp with them.

Little by little this aversion wore off, and—if with reservations—they accepted him as one of the household, even as they accepted the Mistress's temperamental gray Persian kitten, Tippy. All of them except Wolf. Wolf made no secret of his lofty aversion to the foreigner.

Lad, from the start, had constituted himself the coon's sponsor and guardian. It was pretty to see him in a lawn-

romp with the fuzzy baby; enduring unflinchingly the sharp play-bites of Rameses, and unbending as never had he unbent toward any of the grown dogs.

One of Rameses' quaintest tricks was to rise on his hind legs, as on that first day, and to thrust his pointed nose against Lad's ear, as if whispering to the dog. Again and again he used to do this. Lad seemed to enjoy it, for he would stand at grave attention, as though listening to something the coon was confiding to him.

"I'm sure he's telling Laddie a secret when he does that," said the Mistress.

"Nonsense!" scoffed the Master. "We're not living in fable-land. More likely the pesky coon is hunting Lad's ear for fleas. Likelier still, it's just a senseless game they've invented."

"No," insisted the Mistress. "I'm certain he really whispers. He——"

"The only worthwhile thing Rameses ever does, so far as I can see," continued the Master, refusing to argue, "is his washing of everything we give him to eat, before he'll taste it. They say that's just as much a coon trait as the 'whispering.' But it shows a grain of intelligence and a funny love for cleanness. He tried to wash a lump of sugar I gave him today. By the time he had rinsed it in his water dish and scrubbed it between his black palms till he thought it was clean enough, there wasn't any of it left."

The affection between their huge collie and the ever-growing Rameses amused the two humans, even while it astonished them.

They watched laughingly the many absolutely pointless games played by the dog and his queer chum—Lad's blank expression when the coon interrupted one of their romps by climbing—or rather by flowing—up the side of a giant oak, with entire ease, whither the dog did not know in the least how to follow; their gay swims together in the lake, and Lad's consternation at first when the coon would sink at will deep under the water and remain there for a whole minute at a time before sticking his pointed nose and beady little eyes above the surface again.

Nourishing food, and plenty of it, was causing Rameses to take on size and strength at an unbelievable rate; the more since he'd eked out his hearty meals by daily fishing excursions along the lake-edge, whence he scooped up and devoured scores of crayfish and innumerable minnows.

His little black fore claws were as dexterous as hands and tenfold swifter and more accurate. They could feel out a crayfish or mussel from under submerged rocks at will. They could clutch and hold the fastest-swimming minnow which flashed within their prehensile reach.

By the time he was a year old Rameses weighed nearly thirty pounds. At about this time, too, he showed his capacity to take care of himself against any ordinary foe.

One day his fishing trip, along the lake-edge, carried him around the water end of a high fence which divided The Place from an adjoining strip of land. Through the underbrush of this strip a mongrel hound was nosing for rabbits. The hound caught sight of the raccoon, and rushed him. Rameses stood up on his hind legs, the water above his haunches, and grinningly awaited his charging foe.

As the mongrel leaped upon him, Rameses shifted his own position with seeming clumsiness, but with incredible speed. He shifted just far enough for the cur's snapping teeth to miss him.

In the same instant he clasped both his bearlike little arms with strangling tightness around his enemy's neck, and suffered the momentum of the hound's forward plunge to carry him backward and far under water, not once relaxing his death clasp from about the dog's neck.

Under the surface vanished coon and mongrel together, with a resounding splash. The water eddied and swirled unceasingly above them, for what seemed several minutes to the Master who witnessed the battle from a fishing-boat a quarter-mile distant, and who rowed with futile haste to the spot.

The Master arrived above the seething tumble of deep offshore water just in time to see Rameses' sharp nose and grinning mask merrily from the depths.

The mongrel did not rise. The coon's bearlike stranglehold had done its work.

Aware of an unbidden qualm of nausea at the grinningly matter-of-fact slayer, the Master picked Rameses out of the water by the nape of his neck and deposited him in the bottom of the boat.

Unconcernedly, Rameses shook himself dry. Then, spying a slice of bacon-rind bait lying on the gunwale, he reached for it, washed it with meticulous care in the bait-well, and proceeded to eat it with mincing relish. Apparently the mere matter of a canine-killing had passed out of his mind.

But a man clumping fast through the underbrush of the sloping bit of wasteland was not so philosophical about the hound's fate. The man was one Horace Dilver, a ne'er-do-well small farmer who lived a bare mile from The Place.

Dilver had taken his mongrel hound out, in this non-hunting season, to teach him to course rabbits. From the high-road above the lake the man had marked the patch of brushy slope as a promising hiding-place for rabbits, and had sent his dog into it. Thus from the road, he had seen the sharply brief battle with the raccoon. Down the slope he ran, yelling as he advanced:

"I seen that coon of yourn tackle my pore Tige and kill him!" he bellowed to the Master. "If I had my gun with me —"

"If you had your gun with you," rejoined the Master, "you wouldn't be breaking the game laws any worse than you did by making your hound course rabbits in September. I'm sorry for what happened, but it was the dog's fault. He pitched into an inoffensive animal, half his size, and he got what was coming to him."

"I wouldn't of took fifteen dollars for Tige!" the man was lamenting as he glowered vengefully at the placidly grinning and bacon-munching Rameses. "I love that dog like——"

"Yes," put in the Master, bending again to his oars. "I've noticed your love for him. My superintendent tells me your neighbors complained because you used to beat him so brutally when you came home drunk, that his screaming kept them awake at night. Last week I saw you kick him half across the road, when I was driving by. Couldn't you find any easier way of showing your inferiority to a dumb animal

than treating him like that? He's lucky to be free from an owner like you. You have no case against me for what my coon has done, and you know you haven't. You and your dog were both trespassing."

He rowed on homeward, leaving Dilver splitting the noonday hush by a really brilliant exhibition of howled blasphemy.

Rameses perched, squirrel-like, high on the boat's stern seat. He grinned sardonically back at the fist-shaking and cursing farmer. Then the raccoon fell to nibbling in epicurean fashion at what was left of the bacon rind.

As the boat drew in at its dock, the Mistress came down from the lawn above. With her was Lad, who had just come home with her from a walk to the village.

The big dog ran joyously to the boat, to greet its two passengers. As the keel grounded, Rameses stood up on his hind legs. As ever, after even a brief absence, he flung his hairy arms around Lad's hairier throat, his mouth close to the collie's ear, with the odd semblance of whispering secrets to his chum. He seemed to be telling the interested Lad all about his exploit.

The Mistress smiled at sight of the clinging arms and the earnest "whispering," and at Lad's usual grave attention to it.

The Master did not smile. That gently embracing gesture of the coon's brought keenly back to him a nauseous memory of the arms' strangling strength, and of Rameses' grinning unconcern at the slaughter of Tige.

Briefly the Master told his wife what had happened.

“Horrible!” she exclaimed with an involuntary little shudder. With her hand rubbing the slayer’s head, as if in compunction for her momentary distaste, she continued: “But it wasn’t Rameses’ fault. You say yourself he didn’t start it; and he would have been killed by the hound if he hadn’t been just an instant quicker. He isn’t at all to blame.”

“Maybe not,” assented the Master. “But just the same, it was an uncanny thing to do—to drown the antagonist he couldn’t thrash with his teeth! Nothing but a raccoon would have thought of such a trick. I read, long ago, of a wild raccoon killing a dog that way.... I wish Horace Dilver hadn’t been the man who owned the mongrel, though.”

“Why not? Is he—?”

“I’ve heard queer things about Dilver. For instance, Titus Romaine’s four cows got into Dilver’s corn and spoiled most of it. Romaine wouldn’t pay damages. A week later all four of his cows were found dead in their stalls one morning. Slosson’s police dog bit one of Dilver’s children in the ankle. It was only a scratch. But the dog was dead a few days later. The vet thought he had eaten meat with powdered glass in it.”

“*Oh!*”

“Dilver is a sweet soul to have as an enemy! I hope he won’t decide to kill Rameses, as he just threatened to. If he does, we’re likely to have a squabble on our hands. More neighborhood feuds start over livestock killings than over everything else put together. We—”

The Master broke off, to make a futile grab at Rameses. The raccoon had finished his whispered colloquy with Lad. Then he had thrust his arm into the fish-creel the Master

had laid down on the boat-house bench. Drawing thence a two-pound black bass, Rameses was washing it scrupulously in the lake-edge water, preparatory to eating it.

On an evening less than a week after the killing of the mongrel the Master and the Mistress went to an early dinner given by some friends of theirs at the Paradise Inn, at the foot of the lake. The maids were at the movies, over in the village. Bruce was asleep in the Master's study, where his nights were spent. Wolf, vigilant as always, lay on a porch door mat outside the front door, alertly on duty.

Through the early dusk Wolf saw two shapes making their way in leisurely fashion down the dim lawn and toward the lake. One was Wolf's bronze-and-white sire, Lad. The other was a low and shambling creature, less than half the big collie's height.

Well did Wolf recognize Lad and Rameses, and well did he know his sire was accompanying the raccoon on one of the latter's frequent nocturnal fishing expeditions along the shore.

Yet he forebore to leave his mat and trot along with them, not only because he was officially on guard, but because he still had a sullen dislike for the raccoon.

The other dogs had learned to tolerate Rameses comfortably enough. But Wolf's hotly vehement prejudices could not brook any acquaintance at all with the outsider. Wherefore, having long ago been bidden to "let him alone," Wolf kept out of Rameses' way as much as possible.

These fishing jaunts of his coon chum were always of mild interest to Lad. He himself did not understand the art of fishing; nor did he eat raw fish. But manifestly he enjoyed

strolling along the bank and watching Rameses, stomach deep in the water, feel for crayfish under stones or dart beneath the surface with paws and nose together and emerge in triumph with a tiny and wiggling minnow tight gripped.

There was something about his coonlike form of hunting which seemed to appeal to Lad's ever-vivid imagination and to his sense of fun. Head on one side and tulip ears pricked, he would spend hours at a time, an amused spectator at Rameses' minnow-and-crayfish-catching antics.

Tonight the coon worked his way northward, along the shore of The Place, toward the bridge. As on the day when he fought Tige, he swam around the water-jutting end of the fence which divided The Place's north boundary from the strip of bush-slope that ran from the lake to the highway.

Lad swam at his side. When they had rounded the fence end, the collie waded ashore, shaking the water from his vast coat. The coon began, as before, to crawl, stomach-deep, in the shallows, in quest of fish.

Presently Lad raised his head and growled softly. He heard and scented an alien human presence moving furtively toward him from the highway above. This was no human of Lad's acquaintance. Moreover, the collie was no longer on his master's land. Wherefore, he felt no need or duty to bar this stranger's way or otherwise to stop his advance.

Lad knew every foot of The Place's forty acres, and he had been taught from puppyhood that humans were not to be interfered with unless they should trespass thereon. This

bushy slope was no part of The Place. Thus the furtively approaching human's presence was no concern of Lad's.

The growl was not a threat or a menace. Rather was it a mode of notifying his coon chum of the man's approach; or else it was a mere reaction on meeting a human, at dusk, in so isolated a spot.

Horace Dilver did not descend by mere coincidence or accident through the impeding thickets toward the lake's margin, this September evening. He was a patient man. Half a dozen times, during the summer, when he was passing along the shore, he had happened to see the dog and the coon on one of their evening fishing tours. He had noted that this stretch of bank was one of their favorite haunts at such times.

Thus, with deadly patience, he had repaired to the highroad every evening at sunset, since the day when his hound had been strangled by Rameses.

Time meant little to Dilver, and revenge meant much. Soon or late, he was certain, the two chums would fish in that direction again. The time had come sooner than he had dared hope. And Dilver was ready. Dilver had a habit of being ready—except perhaps for work.

Under one arm he held a right formidable and nail-studded club, tucked there ready for use in case of necessity. But he did not expect to be called upon to use it. There were better and safer ways.

Were the dog and the raccoon to be found with their skulls smashed, the Master might get to remembering Dilver's blasphemy-fringed threats and there might be trouble. But if both animals should be taken agonizingly and

fatally ill, soon after their return home, who could prove anything against anybody? Nobody had been able to prove anything in the cases of the poisoned cows and of the police dog.

Besides, Dilver had heard neighborhood brags of big Laddie's prowess, and he did not care to attack so formidable a dog, unless as a last resort. He knew—everyone knew—how devoted were the Mistress and the Master to the great mahogany collie. To kill him at the same time he killed the raccoon, that would be double payment for the drowning of Tige and for the Master's unloving remarks to himself.

The man drew near and nearer, among the lakeside bushes. After the first involuntary growl, Lad paid no further attention to him. Naturally, having a collie's miraculous sense of smell and of hearing, Lad knew to the inch whither each stealthy step was leading the ever-nearer human.

At an instant's voice Lad could have located and sprung at him as Dilver skulked closer with awkward attempt at soundlessness and concealment. But it was none of Lad's business to assail men who chose to slink along on neutral territory. As to the thought of possible danger to himself—fear was one emotion the great dog never had known.

Rameses was equally aware of the man's approach, and he was equally indifferent to it. Humans—except the friendly folk of The Place who had tamed and trained and brought him up—meant nothing and less than nothing in the raccoon's self-centered life. Besides, he was nearing a most seductive school of minnows which took up all his spare attention.

Then the rank human smell was augmented by a far more seductive odor—the scent of fresh raw meat. Dilver had drawn from a pocket a greasy parcel and was unwrapping it.

Something sped through the air, close to Lad's head. The collie, with wolflike swiftness, darted to one side, growling savagely and baring his fangs. If this human were going to throw things at him, the aloof neutrality was at an end.

But, even as he snarled, Lad saw and smelled what the missile was, and his new-born anger died. This was no rock. It was a gift.

It struck the very edge of the lake, midway between the dog and Rameses, and it lay there in the dusk; a chunk of raw red beef, perhaps three ounces in weight, and rarely fascinating to any normal four-legged meat-eater. Rameses saw it at the same time.

Strong as was the temptation, Lad drew back from the luscious morsel, after the first instinctive advance. Had the meat been found lying there, he might or might not have eaten it. But he had heard the man throw it to him and it bore the scent of Dilver's hand.

Always Lad had been taught, as had others of the Sunnybank collies, to accept no food from an outsider.

This is a needful precaution for dogs that go to shows—at which more than one fine animal has been poisoned—or for dogs that have a home to guard and must be prevented from accepting drugged or poisoned meat. Lad had learned the rule, from his earliest days.

He halted in his advance toward the chunk of beef, reluctantly turning away from its lure and thereby saving

himself from a peculiarly hideous form of death.

But Rameses had had no such teachings, and probably would not have profited by them if he had. After a second of polite waiting, to see if Lad intended to share the feast with him, the coon picked up the meat, holding it squirrel-wise between his palms. Horace Dilver grinned almost as broadly as did Rameses himself.

Daintily the coon dipped the meat deep into the water; washing his food, as always, before eating it. Thoroughly he scrubbed the chunk between his handlike claws. In the midst of this rubbing process he paused, allowing the beef to fall uneaten into the shallows.

Blinkingly, the raccoon peered down at his black paws. The palm of one was cut. A drop of blood was oozing from it. The other palm was scratched lightly in two or three places.

The vehement washing and kneading and rubbing had pulled open the carefully interfolded envelope of meat. Its contents—a half-teaspoonful of powdered glass—had excoriated the washer's hands.

Rameses let the meat sink out of sight in the water, while he stared grinningly at his scored palms. Something was wrong here. A hundred times he had washed meat, and never before had it turned on him and scratched him like this. Irritant stuff which will tear the hands will hurt the mouth and stomach, too. Experience with sharp fish fins had taught that simple fact to Rameses, long ago.

Horace Dilver ceased to gloat pleasantly-over his ruse. For some unexplained reason these two creatures were rejecting a lure to which other victims had yielded without a moment's hesitation. Disappointment and an hour of