



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Three Runaways

Abbie Phillips Walker

Mr. Dog sat in front of his house, looking very sad; Mr. Tom Cat came along with his head hanging down, very sad, too.

"Hello, Tommie!" said Mr. Dog. "You look as sad as I feel. What is the matter?"

"Matter enough, Mr. Dog," said Mr. Tom Cat. "I have just been driven out of the house with a broom by cook, who says I am of no use; that I am too fat and too well fed to catch the mice.

"Mr. Dog, I have caught all the mice in that house for years, and just because I slept one night—that was last night—that cook forgets all about all the good work I have done in the past and puts me out, and with a broom, too. Oh, it is too terrible, and I have not had my breakfast, either."

"Tommie, dear fellow," said Mr. Dog, "you certainly have a hard time of it, but let me tell you what has happened to me after all my years of service to the master. Last night a fox got into the hen-house, and just because I did not keep awake all night and catch him the master took me up to the hen-house and put my nose right down on the floor where that fox had walked, and then he boxed my ears. Think of it, Thomas, he boxed my ears before all the hens and chickens and said I was getting old and good for nothing, and I have not had a bite to eat this morning. I wonder what this place is coming to when such good fellows as we are get such treatment. That is what I would like to know, Thomas Cat."

Mr. Tom Cat licked his mouth and stretched himself before he answered: "I think, Mr. Dog, we better give the master and cook a chance to think over what they have done to us and perhaps they may remember all the good things we have done all these years and think that one little mistake was not so bad, after all. I am for running away, I am. What do you say?"

"Now I never thought of that, Thomas," said Mr. Dog, standing up and looking very serious. "I believe that is a good plan, Thomas. I do, indeed; but where shall we run?"

"Oh, we can walk; you know we don't have to run at all, only they call it running away if you go off where people can't find you," said Mr. Tom Cat. "I know a place we can go. Come with me."

"I'll go with you," said Mr. Dog. "Lead the way, Thomas."

Just as they were passing the barn-yard they saw Mr. Rooster scrooged under the fence.

"Hello, Mr. Rooster!" said Mr. Dog. "What has happened to you that you look so unhappy this morning?"

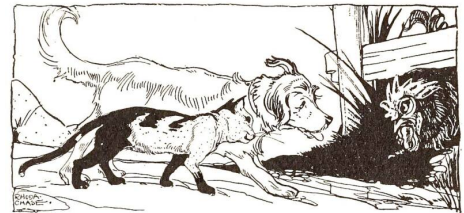
"Why wouldn't I look unhappy?" replied Mr. Rooster. "Here I have been on this farm and looking after all those silly hens these long years, and this morning the master said he wished the fox had got me last night instead of the hen he carried off. I tell you it is hard luck, after all I have done for the master."

"Come with us," said Mr. Tom Cat. "We are running away; the cook chased me out this morning because I happened to sleep all night and didn't catch the mice, and Mr. Dog was blamed because the fox got into your house last night. We are not appreciated around here, that is plain. Will you come along?"

"I had never thought of running away," said Mr. Rooster, getting out from under the fence and flapping the dust from his wings, "but I think I like the idea of running away. I will go along with you. Perhaps the master and those foolish hens of mine will begin to think what a fine fellow I am and wish I had not gone. Where are you going?"

"Oh, to a place I know where no one will find us," said Mr. Tom Cat, running ahead.

Mr. Dog and Mr. Rooster followed Mr. Tom Cat, and soon they were in the woods where the bushes grew thick and the trees shut out the sun.



"Here we are," said Mr. Tom Cat; "now no one will find us and we can rest in ease."

"I have not had my breakfast," said Mr. Rooster, scratching the ground.

"Neither have we," said Mr. Tom Cat, "but I have heard somewhere that you should not think of your troubles and they will not bother you, so suppose we each tell a story to take up the time and also take our minds off the thought that we have not had our breakfast. You begin, Mr. Dog, because you are such a good story-teller and have had so many adventures."

Mr. Dog looked very wise and scratched his head as if he was thinking very hard.

"Did I ever tell you about how I treed a raccoon?" he asked.

Mr. Rooster and Mr. Tom Cat said they never had heard it, but they should like to hear about it very much indeed.

Mr. Dog cleared his throat and then he said: "I have always had the reputation of being a good hunter, especially when coons were in season, but this story which I am about to tell will show that I had the hardest time a dog ever had getting a raccoon.

"One moonlight night the master came out of the house and whistled to me; he had his gun over his shoulder and I knew pretty well what was going to happen; we were going raccoon-hunting.

"So I wagged my tail and gave two or three sharp barks because I knew I could not bark again until I had something to bark about.

"Oh, it was a beautiful night, and just as we got out in the road a little way from the barn I saw something moving. I wasn't sure at first whether it was a fox or a raccoon, both of them being equally fond of visiting the poultry-yard; but I kept very still and pretty soon I saw him right in the full moonlight. It was as fat a raccoon as I ever saw, and he didn't see me and I made a run for him.

"Well, you may have seen a raccoon run, my friends, but believe me when I tell you that you never saw one run as this one did. He gave a bound and away he went, and I went after him, and Mr. Man followed, for I was barking now, for there was reason for it.

"Well, that raccoon got to the tree first, and up he went, for I saw him, and I can tell you I was some tickled, for I knew that the master would be pleased enough when he saw the size of that raccoon.

"After he got into the tree I stood under it and looked up and barked with all my might, and Mr. Man was coming a-running as fast as he could in the distance.

"But while I saw that raccoon go up the tree as plainly as I ever saw anything, I couldn't see hide nor hair of him when I looked up.

"Mr. Man came up to me after a while and said, 'Where is he, Rover?'

"I kept looking up in the tree and barking to keep up my courage, though I could see nothing but tree.

"'You are fooled, old fellow,' said the master; 'he got away from you. Go after him, old boy.'

"But I knew I wasn't fooled, though for the life of me I could not see that raccoon.

"I kept on barking and jumping about and the master took another look, but he did not see that raccoon and pretty soon he got tired.

"'You are a fake, Rover,' he said to me. 'I am going home. We will try it another night and see if you can see straight.' And off he went.

"But I didn't leave that tree. I knew that raccoon couldn't have jumped out of the tree and I also knew he went up the tree, so I was sure he was in the tree right then.

"I barked louder than ever, and though the master whistled and called, I still barked and jumped about.

"Suddenly I thought if I kept very still a minute that raccoon might show his head, so I stepped close to the tree and stood in the shadow and kept quiet. It wasn't more than a minute before, just as I thought, out poked the head of that raccoon to see if I had gone.

"Well, I just barked some then and I danced, and pretty soon master came running back and I jumped and barked right under the place where I had seen the head of Mr. Raccoon.

"Ah, you are right, boy,' I heard the master say, softly, and then bang went his gun and Mr. Raccoon dropped to the ground.

"Good old boy, you can't be fooled, can you, Rover?' said master, patting me on the head; 'you can't be beat for raccoon-hunting. Come along home and show what we got.'

"The next night they had a great time at the master's house. He told them all how I treed that coon and how I stuck to it in spite of his going away and calling to me to go along.

"I was patted on the head and made a great deal of, and every time I see the master with that raccoon cap he wears I feel very happy."

Mr. Dog stopped and looked sad again, and Mr. Tom Cat said: "Oh, cheer up, Mr. Dog, the master will soon be wearing that cap again, and he will remember how you caught the raccoon. That is a good story to tell. Now we will listen to what Mr. Rooster has to tell us."

Mr. Rooster said he would tell them about the new rooster that came to the barn-yard one day.

Mr. Rooster straightened himself and said he was proud to say he was raised on the master's farm. He was proud, too, to say he had succeeded the old rooster that had gone to a dinner one day and did not return.

"I have always taken good care of my family, and, if I do say it, there is not a better-looking family than mine around these parts," said Mr. Rooster.

"There have been many young roosters in the barn-yard, but they have gone away to other farms to live, for the master has an eye for beauty, and he has always decided that I was too—er—valuable to lose."

Mr. Dog and Mr. Tom Cat smiled a little on the side at this last remark, for they well knew how vain Mr. Rooster was, and then he really did have fine feathers and a beautiful comb.

"I have never had any trouble with my family until one morning Madam Blackie came running to me," continued Mr. Rooster, "to tell me a new rooster had come in the barn-yard to live."

"It is shameful the way all those silly hens are running around him," she said. "He isn't noticing them a little bit and they strut back and forth, eying him as if they had never seen a handsome rooster before."

"For my part, I think the old friends are the best, though of course you are not old, my dear Mr. Rooster, only old in acquaintance I mean."

"I had always thought Madam Blackie an old busybody, but now, if this was all true, I had found her my only friend."

"You are most kind, Madam Blackie," I said, "and I thank you, but I feel sure that the master will not have a new rooster here. This new-comer will probably leave in a few days."

"I expected he would, too, for I had as fine a set of spurs as I had ever seen, and I intended to show them to this new rooster."

"As soon as I could get away from Madam Blackie I took a stroll around by the barn-yard, and sure enough there were all my family, even the chickens, walking around and clucking and cackling as hens will at a handsome red-and-black rooster that stood by the barn door."

"I felt pretty queer for a minute, for that new rooster had a very shiny-looking set of feathers, and I knew he would be very popular for a while at least, and with the whole family against me, even my spurs might not make me king."

"I held my head very high, and with my light step I walked past them some distance from the barn, but still I knew they all saw me."

"There was a little flutter at first, and they ran toward me, but they gave a look at the new rooster. I could see them out of the corner of my eyes, and back the whole silly lot went and began their silly cackling and clucking."

"I went behind a wall and watched them through a hole. First they would scratch the ground near the new rooster and talk away to one another, and then they would walk by him, but not once did he turn his head."

"He isn't going to let them think he sees them," I thought; but the longer I watched the stranger it seemed to me that with all those fine-looking hens and chickens cackling about him he should not look once their way; and then a

thought came to me which made me jump up, so I crawled under the gate and walked into the barn-yard.

"I walked right up to that family of mine and looked at them, and then I looked at the new rooster. I was right close to him then.

"Every hen opened her eyes and mouth, for they thought right then and there was to be a settlement of rights, but one glance at the new rooster told me what I had thought was true, and I just turned my back on him and said: 'When you silly hens and chickens get tired of admiring the new weather-cock you better come over in the lot back of the barn. There is some corn and grain on the ground. I am surprised that my family cannot tell a tin weather-cock from a real rooster,' and away I walked with my head held higher than ever.

"After that I never had the least trouble with them, but of course I found out that Madam Blackie had been the first one to see the tin rooster and had gone right up to him and found it out, and then waited to see if the others would be fooled. When she found they were she ran away to tell me.

"Oh, it takes all kinds of hens to make a barn-yard family!" sighed the rooster.

"I guess they will miss you," said Mr. Dog, "and the master will, too, for all the hens are likely to run away, with no one to keep them at home."

"Tommie Cat, we will hear what you have to tell. I bet it will be about a mouse."

"You win the bet," said Mr. Tom Cat.

"My story," said Mr. Tom Cat, "is about a mouse, the only mouse that ever got away from me—that is, the only one that I ever saw. Of course, I did not see the ones that cook thought I should have caught.

"I came to live at the master's house when I was a very little kitten, and right away I began to catch the mice.

"I have heard it said that my mother and father were the best mousers anywhere around, and I expect I take after them. Anyway, I could catch mice, so I became a great pet in the house.

"And while I always had plenty of milk—and sometimes cream—to eat, I never failed to catch a mouse each night, and sometimes more, for a cat had not lived in the house for years, and those mice thought they owned it until I came.

"They ran about everywhere, on the pantry shelves and all over the rooms at night, and they would even run over me sometimes when I was taking forty winks; but I soon stopped that. I played I was asleep when I wasn't and caught those silly mice until the others began to learn that I was a thing to be feared and not to be taken as a joke.

"But there was one mouse I could not catch. He was larger than the others and had a little piece taken out of one ear, so I always knew him, and it gave me no end of worry to think he always escaped me.

"The others called him Tip, because it was the tip of his ear that was gone; and Tip was some runner, I can tell you. He could get through the smallest hole in the wall and he could get away from you when you had your paw right over him. I made up my mind to get Tip if I had to let the other mice have the house, and so for a week I laid for Tip.

"One night he came out of his hole and jumped right over my head and I chased him around the kitchen, when all at once right before my eyes he disappeared.

"I sniffed and hunted. I knew he was there, but I could not see him or find him. All at once I saw a shoe of the master's, that stood near the stove, move, and as quick as a wink I flew at it and put in my paw.

"Did I get Tip? No, sir; that slick little fellow crawled out of a hole in the side of that shoe and ran for his hole in the wall, laughing and giggling to think he had fooled me again.

"I did not sleep for two days after that, sitting by that hole in the wall, and I was thinking how hungry Tip must be, having to stay in there without any food and feeling sure he would have to come out soon or starve, when I felt something touch my tail.

"I turned around and there was Tip. How he got out I never knew, but I expect he gnawed a hole in another part of the wall. Anyway, there he was sitting on his hind legs and making funny motions with his front paws.

"I jumped, but he was ready for that, and away he scampered into the pantry and I after him.

"Over the shelves he went, and I went, too. Back of the boxes, and I went, too, tins and dishes falling with clatter and smash, but I did not care. I was after that Tip mouse and I knew it was now or never.

"He knew it was a fight to the death, I think, by the mad dash he made behind dishes and tins, but after a while he grew tired and made for his hole in the wall. I knew that was my chance to get him in the open, and I flew after him and reached him with the tip of my paw, but it was only his tail I had. Tip was in the hole. I grabbed at the tail with my teeth and off it came. I have that tail yet, for I never got Tip, and I like to look at it sometimes just to get up my fighting spirit."

"Didn't you ever see Tip again?" asked Mr. Rooster and Mr. Dog.

"Oh yes, I saw him once after that," said Mr. Tom Cat, with a yawn.

“Why didn’t you catch him?” they asked, together.

“Oh, Tip was in a trap when I saw him,” said Mr. Tom Cat.

“Was it one of those traps that catch them by the head?” asked Mr. Dog.

“No, it was a little wire affair,” said Mr. Tom Cat, “and I looked in and saw him running about.”

“Why didn’t you catch him then when the master opened the trap? Didn’t they give you a chance at him?”

“No, Mr. Dog,” said Mr. Tom Cat, looking very lofty. “I am a sportsman and no true sportsman ever touches a caged mouse. Tip was let out of the trap, and the master thought I would catch him, but I didn’t even run after him, and for all I know Tip may be living yet. I will do my own hunting and catching; none of those traps can ever help me to get a mouse.”

“Some of his grandchildren might go back there to live, even if Tip did not return to the hole in the wall,” said Mr. Dog.

“It might be that those very mice that were running about last night were some of his relations.”

“I never thought of that,” said Mr. Tom Cat. “I will watch for them to-night, and whether they are or not I will remember Tip and catch them all.”

“I guess I will go along with you,” said Mr. Dog. “I am pretty hungry, and it must be dinner-time.”

“If you all are going home, I guess I better get back in time for dinner, too,” said Mr. Rooster; “my family will think I am lost.”

So all three started off for their home, forgetting all about their grievances in listening to the story each had told, and if nothing has happened to them I expect they are living there yet.

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