

Another version of Evil Dog

Devilish

It may be true that the less mature a mind, the more likely it will see what isn't there. That's probably why the only time I wondered about devils was when I was a kid. My boyhood friend George and I thought we saw one at the foot of our street on a hot and sultry summer night, flitting around the front porch of the Granelli house. We saw devils everywhere after that, not knowing Mrs. Granelli wore a Halloween devil's costume on Friday nights when her husband came home off the road.

I'm sure the dog that stayed with us for a short time that summer was a devil. But I didn't know it until I lived with her for a week, just as my brother would say about his wife years later. Belonging to Freddie the newspaper boy, Tapioca was a beautiful Golden Retriever that was far superior to the ordinary mongrels who lay around our neighborhood like welfare recipients ... which they were. But Tapioca was indeed a devil.

I talked Dad into letting me care for her when Freddie left with his family for a week in the Adirondacks. Hell Week, my father began to call it by Monday night. The dog stole my socks at night and constantly begged for food. Not just any food or the garbage, but the food on our plates, while we were trying to eat.

All day long Tapioca ran up and down the street with no apparent purpose in her small mind, except possibly to bother the neighbors. At night

she tore through the house, bursting through doorways, skidding and scraping her nails across my mother's immaculate floors. Each day Tapioca shed hair in great fistfuls, yet never went bald. Mom, a fastidious housekeeper, ran the vacuum cleaner every few hours. Dad thought a haircut might help. But shearing the canine bundle of energy was like trying to paint an unguided missile in flight. To contain her, I had to get hold of the dog around the neck and drag her into bathroom and flop her into the tub. And to keep her there, I had to get in with her. Cooped up in a tub with a dog whose breath stinks is no fun. It was worse than when she woke me up in the morning by barking in my face.

Tapioca's only talent was speed. For an animal she was not very agile. She seldom caught a ball when I threw it to her. I'm sure there are turtles that could play catch better than Tapioca. But the dog was extremely sociable. Tapioca thought she was human, except she could run faster. Presuming to be a member of our family, she wouldn't leave anyone alone. At night she nuzzled her way under my covers and in the morning she was first at the breakfast table where she could be counted upon to ask for seconds of everything, please.

"That dog is the devil himself," Mom said the second day Tapioca was with us. I could only agree. Girl or boy dog, Freddie should have named her Lucifer. I can't think of anyone else who would stand up to God, not back down and do as she damn well pleased. Must have been the redhead in her.

Dad's blood pressure rose steeply by Wednesday.

"Does the damned animal ever stop panting?" asked my father as he tried to eat his supper while Tapioca sat under the table between his legs, drooling on his knee.

"Tonight," he said pointedly to me, "I want you to take the dog around the neighborhood for a few hours and show her off to everyone. You know, let everyone see what a beautiful dog she is."

“They already know her,” I said.

“And don’t come back till it gets dark,” he added.

So I went up to George’s house. I let Tapioca roam the neighborhood, because George had two rabbits in a cage in his back yard. The night before I had tried to console him after his father broke the news that Harvey and Speedy were never intended to be pets. They were to be Sunday’s dinner.

Both George and I were now completely dejected. The rabbits weren’t much happier, somehow sensing their doom coming Sunday. Idly, we stuck pieces of celery and bits of bread through the chicken wire cage to feed the rabbits and calm them down, not thinking we were probably fattening them up for the feast at which they would be the entrée.

A thought occurred to me. I turned to George and said, “If the Devil wanted to come up and make a mess of things in our neighborhood, how do you think he would appear?”

“I thought the devil lived on Mrs. Granelli’s front porch,” said George.

“There may be more than one,” I answered, the hair prickling up on the back of my neck.

George was silent for moment, then he spoke.

“As a pretty girl,” he replied “who would tempt us and fool us and have us paint our tree fort pink and hide our baseball gloves.”

“Tempt us to do what?” I said.

“I don’t know exactly,” he replied, “but I read something about it in a magazine my cousin Billy gave me,”

He had my attention.

“Do you still have the magazine?” I asked.

“No,” he said, “my sister found it and gave it to my mother. Maybe that’s why they’re murdering my pets,” he said and his voice choked up a little.

I said nothing for a few moments, wondering if I wanted to be tempted by a girl to do anything. I decided I’d probably want to try it, whatever it was. Tapioca could be heard running through the neighborhood, barking a hello to every man, woman, child and miscellaneous creature. A few angry shouts accompanied her travel.

“I think the Devil would appear as a friendly dog,” I finally said.

“Oh, OK,” he said. “Like Tapioca?”

“Maybe,” I said, “but for sure friendly and panting. Following me around and jumping on my lap and getting up close to me while I eat my supper, sitting on the floor at my feet and rubbing up against my leg.

“Yes, yes” he said enthusiastically, “and she can have my baseball glove!”

“No, I meant ...”

“Pink isn’t all that bad a color,” he interjected.

“George! I’m talking about the Devil appearing as a DOG!”

“Be more fun if it was a girl in a ... bustier,” he said.

“What’s a bustier?” I asked.

“I’m not sure,” he answered. “someone tore the picture out of the magazine before I got it.”

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dave@windsweptpress.com