

Flame, A Dog With A Tale

By Justice Kocher

Once upon a time ago, in a small village in Ireland there lived a hunter who endlessly tramped the fields with his gun dog in search of quail and pheasants. Although he worked very hard, he rarely made much and despite the good care that his wife gave him, he grew thin and tired. So you can understand that when his dog showed signs of illness, he was overcome with grief and despair. His poor Setter was soon unable to get out of his bed and when one morning the cottage was filled with the smell of death, he almost gave up hope. Since he had no money saved (for he had spent it all paying for the upkeep of their humble cottage and buying food), he decided that he would go to the village and ask if somebody would sell them a dog for which he would pay later with the money he earned from hunting with his new companion. So early the next morning he set out on his errand with a light heart. When at last he came to the village he took with good humor the comments on his dress, hair and worn frayed boots. When he arrived at the breeders he was astonished at his good luck, for in front of him was the most beautiful litter of puppies he had ever seen. They were all of the good Irish Setter type and looked as if they would be swift and persistent in the hunt. One of the puppies looked rather scrawny and was obviously the runt of the litter. But seeing that all the other pups were almost perfect specimens, he went with a glad heart to make negotiations with the owner. But the owner was a rich and cruel man, and seeing the poor man's clothes said that the only one he could spare was the runt, and he alone would cost thirty gold coins. When the hunter heard this his heart sank, for this breeder was the only man in the village with a litter of puppies for sale. Discouraged, but determined to make the best of it, he took his puppy and went home.

His disappointment over his dog did not last long, for very soon he proved himself a better hunter than any the man had ever owned before. Not only was Flame (the name he had chosen for his dog) strong, swift, beautiful and persistent in the hunt but more importantly every quail, snipe or pheasant that he pointed or flushed was turned to gold. Very soon what had once been a poor cottage was made into a snug shed and a beautiful house was built nearby. Their very small gardens (with the help of hired hands from the village) were spread far into the forest surrounding their beautiful new home. Along with all the good that Flame brought to the good couple, he also attracted the attention of some greedy and miserly rogues who lived in the great Haunted Castle in the mountains to the north. One day after our hunter and his dog arrived home in the evening, one of these aforesaid rogues and misers crept up to the doghouse where Flame was sleeping on a wool blanket that the good housewife had woven with the greatest care for his bed. Nobody saw as the wicked old man slipped a choke chain round his neck and dragged him off into the forest.

What his good master did not know is that brushing him every evening was necessary for the game he pointed to turn to gold. When the cruel man arrived at the castle with his prize he was honored with a huge banquet, but the prize it seems they did not value anymore and tossed him in a small cage without a thought of giving him food, water and good care. The next day when they brought him out to hunt he did an excellent job. Only all the birds he flushed or pointed stayed just the same. When this happened the cruel men held a council and decided that they would teach the dog something by locking it in the cellar every day without food or water until it would point the birds to gold. Everyday when they took him out to hunt he would faithfully cast back and forth in the cover and always turn up a number of birds but they had no more value than the average quail or pheasant. The men decided they would sell him in town to someone who still thought he was of great value. As one last mean trick they decided they would lower him into the box he was to travel in by his tail, but sadly for them just as he was about to be set inside the box, his tail broke off and with a mighty leap he cleared the foolish men and began a speedy journey towards his former home. The hunter, who had been hysterical for the past few days because of the loss of his dog, was overjoyed to see his companion and his dog made a valiant effort to wag his stump of a tail. The good man's wife prepared a warm stew, a clean bed and fresh water for Flame. That evening, sitting around the fire the hunter brushed his matted coat and combed the cockleburs from his ears.

After two day's rest, Flame was again sitting at the door in the morning waiting for his master to come with his gun. What his happy master did not know was that at the very moment that he went out the door two men from the Haunted Castle were hidden in the woods hoping to mug our protagonist and steal his Flame. As Flame was running along he smelled the two men from where they were hiding in a patch of cover and froze in fear. The hunter, mistaking this for a point, sent his dog in to flush the birds. When Flame refused, the hunter, rather disappointed, began to run at the cove and when the leaves rustled as the two men crouched for their attack the hunter quickly emptied the contents of his rifle into the bushes. The two evil men, blinded and scared, began running to the north. Unheeding the mud beneath their feet and the willows scratching against their face, they ran straight into the Haunted River to be drowned in the swift current. The good hunter and his dog returned home safely for many a hunt to come. The hunter and his wife led a happy, modest life and lived happily for the rest of their days!

And this is how a dog with a tale became a dog without a tail!

The End