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JAMES THURBER

The Thin Red Leash

It takes courage for a tall thin man to lead a tiny Scotch terrier pup on a smart red leash in our neighborhood, that region bounded roughly (and how!) by Hudson and West Streets, where the Village takes off its Windsor tie and dons its stevedore corduroys. Here men are guys and all dogs are part bull. Here "cute" apartments stand quivering like pioneers on the prairie edge.

The first day that I sallied forth with Black Watch III bounding tinily at the street end of the thin red leash, a cement finisher, one of the crowd that finds an esoteric pleasure in standing on the bleak corner of Hudson and Horatio Streets, sat down on the sidewalk and guffawed. There were hoots and whistles.

It was apparent that the staunch and plucky Scotch terrier breed was, to these uninitiated bulldog-lovers, the same as a Pekingese. But Black Watch must have his airing. So I continued to brave such witticisms as

"Hey, fella, where's the rest of it?" and—this from a huge steamfitter—"What d'y' say me an' you an' the dog go somewheres and have tea?"

Once a dockworker demanded, in a tone indicating he would not take Black Watch III for an answer, "What's that thing's name?"

My courage failed me. "Mike," I said, giving the leash a red-blooded jerk and cursing the Scotty. The whole affair was a challenge to my gumption. I had been scared to call my dog by its right name.

The gang was on hand in full force the next evening. One of them snapped enormous calloused fingers at Black Watch and he bounded away, leash and all, from my grasp.

"Black Watch!" I shouted—if you could call it shouting.

"What did y' call that dog, fella?" demanded a man who, I think, blows through truck exhaust whistles to test them.

"Black Watch," said I.

"What's that mean?" he asked menacingly.

"It was a Scottish regiment wiped out at Ypres or somewhere," I said, pronouncing it "Eeprr."

"Wiped out where?" he snarled.

"Wiped out at Wipers," I said.

"That's better," he said.

I again realized that I had shown the white feather. That night I took a solemn, if not fervent, oath to tell

the next heavy-footed lout that flayed my dog to go to hell. The following evening the gang was more numerous than ever. A gigantic chap lunged forward at us. He had the build of a smokestack-wrecker.

"Psst!" he hissed. Black Watch held his ground.

"They're scrappers, these dogs," I protested amiably.

"What d' they scrap—cockroaches?" asked another man, amid general laughter. I realized that now was the time to die. After all, there are certain slurs that you can't take about your dog—gang or no gang. Just then a monstrous man, evidently a former Hudson Duster who lifts locomotives from track to track when the turntables are out of order, lounged out of a doorway.

"Whadda we got here?" he growled.

"Park Avenoo pooch," sneered one gas-house gangster. The train-lifter eyed Black Watch, who was wagging his tail in a most friendly manner.

"Scotty, ain't it?" asked the train-lifter, producing a sack of scrap tobacco.

"Yeah," I said, as easily as I could.

"Damn fine dogs, Scotties," said the train-lifter. "You gotta good 'un there, when it puts on some age, scout. Hellcats in a fight, too, *I* mean. Seen one take the tonsils out of a Airedale one day."

"Yeah?" asked the smokestack-wrecker.

"Yeah," said the train-lifter.

"Yeah," said I.

Several huge hands went down to pat a delighted shaggy head. There were no more catcalls or hoots. Black Watch III had been acquitted of Pomeranianism. We're quite good friends now, Black Watch and the gang and I. They call him Blackie. I am grateful to a kind Fate that had given the train-lifter the chance, between carrying locomotives, to see a Scotty in action.