

# *Paddy Boy of Ardagh*

By NELLIE CAMERON, Davidson, Sask.



*He was devoted to his "Young Master". They had grown up together.*

For almost ten years a familiar sight in the small main street town was that of a man walking to work each morning, closely followed by what at first glance appeared to be a "Little Black Shadow." As the man put the key in the office door the small shadow would dart forward into full view to reveal himself as a stocky, sturdy black cocker spaniel. Front paws on door-step, tail wagging impatiently, he would dash into the office the exact minute the door was opened.

This was the procedure, not just one morning, not one day only, but day after day for almost ten years.

Recently he had decided to take life easier. So, though he followed, in well trained "heel fashion" his master each morning, he frequently spent the afternoon at home with his mis-

tress, making only the occasional neighborly call.

He was a quiet little fellow, quiet but friendly. He knew only kindness and loyalty, and returned it a hundredfold.

His friends were the casual passers-by who paused to chat with him, in down-to-earth dog-language. A bright and shining place in his memory was kept for the fine old gentleman, who stopped to pat him and talk to him. Sometimes on a chilly day he would even lean over, to open the office door and let him in. Ah, there was a friend!

There was another man, too, who gave him "Bones." There were the small children in his corner of the town. As the years moved along he paid less attention to them. He could "take them or leave them," but he

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liked to listen to their happy voices at play. Sometimes they would shout "Hi, Paddy." They knew him and he knew them. It was all part of his peaceful contented life.

He was devoted to his "Young Master." They had grown up together. What times they had had! What fun it was, on a hot summer's day to swim in the cool dam! What joy to sit in the prow of the slim kayak, while his Young Master paddled, first one side and then the other, over the smooth green water. There was almost ecstatic delight, as they drifted along, with the willows brushing the water's edge, ducks floating at a safe distance, and sometimes a beaver or a muskrat pushing his black nose up through the surface, then swimming away, leaving a slim trail behind him. Yes, he even learned to abide the ducks, though some inner urge to leap into the water and pursue stirred within him every time he saw them.

Then could he ever forget the race after the large Jack Rabbit one very hot day, over the summerfallow. It was so soft his big feet sank in. Finally with impatient short sharp yelps of frustration he abandoned the chase.

There were the long trips to the "Coast." At first he liked them. He knew by the "signs" — the washing of the car; the packing; the comings and goings; what was afoot, and he never stirred from the car-wheel. When that car went he would be in it. But sometimes on the journey the days seemed long and he grew tired. He tried to decide which was best — to go — or stay behind with the kindly next door neighbor. Still it was such a long time to be left behind. But, when "They" came

home, especially the last time, (and he admitted to himself he was a little ashamed of this) — late at night he heard them. The "Young Master" came to meet him and he—Paddy—the gay Irish one, he cried. Yes, he cried, for joy though, when he greeted all three of them. They held him in their arms; they petted him; they soothed his joy into a calmer state, but it was many minutes before he could believe they were really home to stay.

His devotion to the Young Master was complete. After the Boy had grown to a tall young man, and had to leave him for long weeks at a time, he would welcome him home with almost painful delight, following him everywhere. He even crossed the threshold into the Sacred Living Room, with only a brief furtive glance, from solemn brown eyes, at his Mistress. But he sensed that the ban was lifted for these "Happy Times."

At other times he would lie in the doorway, front end in Living Room and rear end in kitchen, listening to the sweet wild music of the piano, waiting for the crazy romp around the back yard and the trip down town after the milk.

The time of day he loved best was the evening. Then, when all three of the family were safely indoors, he abandoned himself to luxurious content, stretched out at full length on the cool floor.

He didn't ask much from life, just to live peacefully and happily with his neighbor dogs and man, and be near the ones he loved and knew best. The world was a fine place full of trusty friends. No danger threatened.

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Then, one day, Ruthless Power, in the guise of a large and ferocious dog, struck. At first Paddy thought — “This big fellow wants to play with me,” than later, “Surely this play is getting very rough, I’m getting tired.” Later still when the cruel teeth pierced his throat, his last conscious thought was: “Where, oh, where is my Master?” “Where are they all?” Then darkness . . .

What seemed much later he slowly wakened.

It was chilly.

The stars were twinkling down. The frost was turning his black coat white.

His throat! What awful thing was wrong with his throat?

He heard a soft voice speaking, “Oh, poor dog.”

Then a low menacing growl warned him that he must lie very still.

Someone was calling. The huge dog was taken into a house.

Slowly, cautiously, painfully he pulled himself up and with faltering, dragging steps, but with a heart that said, “Hang on, Paddy,” traversed the two endless blocks to his home. The house was silent and dark. He never knew how he got up the back steps and into the porch. There, on his woolly mat, he fell down.

He was cold.

Something was terribly wrong with his throat. It hurt to cough. Yet he had to cough. Red dyed the mat, where he laid his head.

His Master found him there when he came home from the nearby rink.

Gently he carried him inside and made a soft bed near the fire. Oh, the blessed warmth!

Two, three, four days dragged by, days of alternating chills and burning fever. Then about two o’clock on the fourth day, with his Master and Mistress bending over him, patting and soothing him, he suddenly stretched out; his breathing, that harsh rasping breathing, stopped.

The once peaceful life of Paddy Boy of Ardagh was over.

Two hours later the Young Master came home. The Mistress had laid some evergreen branches around the small black body, and he lay, as he often had in life, as if asleep.

They talked over his sad and untimely end as one talks over “The Dear Departed.”

Then the Young Master chose a shady spot in the garden where Paddy had loved to lie on long summer afternoons. He dug his grave, and, wrapped in his blanket and covered with the cedar branches, Paddy was laid to rest with loving hands.

## *Epilogue*

It is silent in the kitchen now. There is no scratching at the door. No thud of a heavy body lazily dropping down on the floor. No sure welcome when we come home.

As I glance out of the window a rounded mound of earth is all that remains of a small black dog. In everything but speech he was the truest and most loyal friend we may ever know.

## Furry Boarders

By WILMA R. AIM, Age 13  
Grade 9, Bredenburg High School

If you were to visit our farm, you would find it on the bank of a marshy creek. It is not unusual then, in such surroundings, that we have grown up in close communion with nature, and made friends with many species of wildlife. I have often seen the muskrat, furry little fellow, whisking along a quiet path or shyly poking his nose above the water. But it was not until two years ago that I had an opportunity to observe his customs and habits closely.

It all began in the late fall, just after the first snowfall. Tracks appeared, first around the house, then the barn. Then, one morning when dad opened the barn door, on his way to morning chores, he found a small muskrat curled up in one of the stalls.

Johnny, for that is what we called the little fellow, quickly made himself at home and built himself a comfortable nest of hay. We had several cats at the time, all of which slept curled together in a heap in the hay. When the weather became colder, Johnny joined them, and there we would find him curled up, fast asleep. We were afraid at first that some of the older

cats would harm the muskrat, but they never bothered him. The kittens welcomed a new playmate and would roll over and over on the floor in play with him. Johnny ate with the cats at their dish and he loved to nibble at the pail in which their food was carried.

In an empty stall we placed a large tub and kept it filled with fresh water. This the little fellow loved and would wash himself several times a day, using both paws in a manner similar to that of a cat. Every inch of his body was scrubbed, even the long rat-like tail. Then, finished, he would hop from the tub and wring the water from the fur.

When winter was almost over Johnny was joined by his wife, or husband, as the case may be. She appeared in the same mysterious manner as Johnny had and immediately took up housekeeping. She never became quite as tame as Johnny, he liked to have his back scratched with a short stick; this she wouldn't allow. We never attempted to handle the two, though they were so tame that I believe it would have been possible. They both were adventuresome and Johnny often attempted to nibble at our rubbers (this I tried to discourage as I never knew how large a nibble he would take).

The couple began to build a new nest and they became more distant in their attitude. Presently the young were born. We could hear their tiny cries but never saw them. The older ones seldom ventured from their quarters and distinctly longed for privacy, for they began the hopeless

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When the snow clears away and the frost is out of the ground we shall plant a small Fast-growing Pine.

He might have—he should have—lived out his days in peace and safety. But he died — a victim of a way of life, where Society tolerates Power, and the weak and gentle have no place.