LONNIE set the greasy bug of table scraps on a hummock of wire grass and leaned over the branch, burying his face in the cool water. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Hundreds of black, frisky water bugs, aroused at his invasion of their playground, scurried to the middle of the stream, swerved as though playing follow-the-leader, and scooted back to the bank.

The boy laughed at their capers. Slowly, he stooped over the water. His hand darted as a cottonmouth strikes and he snatched one of the bugs and smelled it. There was a sharp, sugary odor on the bug.

"A sweet stinker, sure as my name is Lonnie McNeil," the boy muttered. If you caught a sweet stinker among water bugs, it meant good luck, maybe. Everybody knew that. Lonnie held the bug behind him, closed his eyes, tilted his head and whispered, to the pine trees, the branch, the wire grass and anything else in the silence that wanted to hear him and would never tell his wish: "I hope Moreover is always a good dog."

THE BISCUIT EATER

By JAMES STREET

Then Lonnie put the bug back in the branch. It darted in circles for a second and skedaddled across the creek, making a beeline for the other bugs. There were tiny ripples in its wake. The boy grinned. He was in for some good luck. If the sweet stinker had changed its course, it would have broken the charm.

He picked up his bag of scraps, crossed the branch on a log and moseyed to the edge of the woods where the cleared land began. He pursed his lower lip and whistled the call of the catbird, watching the cabin in the field where Text lived with his mother, Aunt Charity, and her brood. Old Charity had a heap of young'uns, but Text was the last. She had listened to her preacher for days during protracted meetings, seeking a fit'n name for her man-child. And because the evangelist took text from this and text from that, she named him Text and reckoned it was a name that God approved. Or else the preacher wouldn't have used it so much.

Lonnie saw Text run to the rickety front gallery of the cabin and listen. He whistled again. Text answered
The Negro asked Text, "What'll you chip in to boot?"

Text said, "You done cut out the dawg so far I don't want no share of him. You done low-rated him too much. If he sucks eggs at my house, my maw'll bust me in two halves. Whatcha want to boot?"

"Whatcha got?"

"Nothing," said Text, "'cept'n two big hands what can tote a heap of wood. Tote your shed full of light' knots for boot."

"What else?"

Text thought for a minute, weighing the deal.

Lonnie wanted that dawg. I know where there's a pass of May haws and a honey bee tree."

The Negro man said, "It's a deal, boys, if you pick me I'll lead you. I'll lead you. I'll lead you a hard bucket full of May haws and show you the bee tree."

Lonnie took the block from the dog and led him across the field. Then Text led him awhile. Out of sight of the Negro's shack, the boys stopped and examined their possession.

Text ran his hand over the dog, smoothing the fur.

"He's a good dawg, ain't he, Lon? Look at them big ol' eyes, and them big ol' feet, and that big ol' long tail. Bet he can point birds from here to yeronder. Betcha if he tries, he can point partridge on light bread. What we gonna name him, Lon?"

Lonnie said, "Dunno, Text. But listen, don't ever call him 'Dawg.' He looks like the dawg, then at Text. "You know." He held his fingers in the shape of a biscuit and pantomimed as though he were eating.

The dog didn't understand. Neither did Text. So Lonnie whispered, "You know, 'biscuit eater.' Don't ever call him that. That's what's with matter with him. He expects a beating when he hears it."

"Naw," said Text, "I 'member the time that big ol' brother of mine, ol' First-and-Second-Thessalonians, fetched a goat home, and maw didn't low-rate him. She just said she had some young 'uns, she didn't mind a goat. I suspect she feels the same way 'bout a dawg, if he's got a Bible name."

"I reckon so too," said Lonnie, and ran home and told his father about the deal.

Harvey told his son, "It's all right for you and Text to keep the dog, but don't you want to run around my good dogs."

Lonnie said, "He's a good dog, papa. He just ain't had no chance."

Harvey looked at his son. The boy was growing, and the man was proud. "I'm going to work Silver Belle in the south forty," he said. "Want to come along?"

Lonnie shook his head. Harvey knew then how much the boy loved his new dog; for, ordinarily, Lonnies would have surrendered the scheme to use it to company his father when he worked Silver Belle. She was the finest pointer in the Ames kennels and Harvey had trained her since puppyshood. Already, she had won the Grand National twice. A third win would give his employer permanent possession of the third National trophy, and Harvey wanted to win the prize for Mr. Ames more than he wanted anything in the world. He pampered Silver Belle. She was a small pointer—so small she had to wear a silver bell when she hunted."

After his father and Silver Belle were gone, Lonnie collected the table scraps and went across the bench to Text's. "Let's work him across the ridge today," Lonnie said. "Papa's got Silver Belle in the south forty and he won't want us and Moreover around."}

Text said, "It's a go, Lon. I'll snitch ol' First-and-Second-Thessalonians' shotgun and meet you 'cross the ridge. But that there lan' over there is powful close to Mr. Eben's place. I don't want no truck with that man."

"I ain't afraid of Mr. Eben," said Lonnie.

"Well, I am. And so are you! And so is your paw!"

"Papa is not afraid of anything, and I'll rust you in two halves if you so much as directions."

"Then how come he didn't whip Mr. Eben when Mr. Eben kicked his dawg about two years ago?"

Nagging on the ridge, and forgot nothing. Everybody in the county had wondered why Harvey McNeil hadn't threshed Eben, when the farmer kicked one of the McNeil dogs with his heel.

Lonnie was ashamed. He said, "Papa didn't whip Mr. Eben 'cause mother asked him not to, that's why."

"Lady folks sho' are buttinicks," Text said. "All time trying to keep men folk from whuppin each other. Lady folks sho' are scuttlers. All 'cept your maw and my maw, hub, Lon?"

"Lonnies is just a crotchety man. Mother said so. He don't mean no harm."

"That's what you say," Text said. "But he's a scutter from way back. May be he's just like a dog. He drinks the blood, and its poyed scared of him. His lan' say, 'Posted. Keep Off. Law.' And I ain't messin' around on' there."

Lonnie often had worked dogs with his father and had seen the best run at field trials. He began training Moreover by inspiring confidence in him. The big dog was durny, but Lonnie never upbraided him. When Moreover smelled a trace of good traits, Lonnie and Text patted him. When he erred, they simply ignored him. The dog had a marvelous range, and moved through the saw grass at an easy gait, never tiring. He was not spectacular, but constant. He ran with a sort of awkward lope, twisting his head as though he still were.
tugging a block. But he covered
ground. Day after day he trained and
worked until the boys painted and
stretched on the ground. Then he stood
a strange point. He would
look in the silo’s head in the air, then turn
it slowly toward Lonnie as he came to a
point, his tail was like a ramrod. The first
time Text shot over him, he cov-
ered. The boys showed their displeasure
by ignoring him. He soon was no
longer gun-shy and he worked for the
cheer of joy working.

"He is a good dawg," Text said.
They were working him that day on the
ridge near Eben’s farm and Moreover,
trailing a huge covey, raced through
the stubble and disappeared in the
sage. When the boys found him he
was frozen on a point far inside Farmer
Eben’s posted land. And watching
Moreover from a pine thicket was
Eben, a shotgun held loosely in the
crook of his arm.

Text was terror-striken and gaped
at Eben as though the stubble-faced
man were an ogre. Lonnie took one
look at his dog, then at the man, and
walked to the thicket. Text was in his
shadow. "Please don’t shoot him, Mr.
Eben," Lonnie said.

The farmer said, "Huh?"

"No, sir, please don’t shoot him," Text
found his courage. "He couldn’t read
your post sign:" Eben scowled. "I don’t aim to shoot
him. I mean, he’s the one that gets round my
sheep. I was watching his point. Right
pretty, ain’t it?"

Lonnie said, "Mighty pretty. He’s a
good dog, Mr. Eben. If ever you
want a mess of birds, I’ll give you
the loan of him."

"Nothing shaking," Eben said. "He’s
that biscuit eater, you see. I raised one
that nighed over the ridge.

Text protested, "Don’t go calling him biscuit eater, please, uh. He don’t
like it."

you and Text the joy of painting
around the kennels. You can earn your
entry fee. Is it up to you?"

"Yes-sirree, bob," Lonnie stuffed
food in his mouth and hurried through
his meal. "I’m going to high-tail it over
and tell Mr. Ames what you said."

Harve walked down the front path
with his son. The boy reached to his
shoulders. It was nice to walk
down the path with his father. The father
said simply and in man’s talk, “Maybe I’m
lucky to have you with your dog and your
entry fee. You might whip me and
Belle, but I’m sure Mr. Eben will give you
my job of training his dogs.”

Lonnie didn’t reply. But at the gate
he paused and faced his father. “Papa,
you are beary impressed with the
story, aren’t you?”

The trainer leaned against the gate
and lit his pipe. "Son," he said, "I ain’t
scared of nothing but God. But don’t
tell your mother."

Mr. Ames, the Philadelphia sports-
man, sat on the steps of the gun-club
lodge and laughed when he saw his
tuck coming up the driveway. His
crowns, who had come to the county
seat for the trials—a sort of a
minor-league semi-finals for dog

driving. Silver Belle was beside him.
Lonnie and Text were on the truck bed
dogs all around them, and behind
the bench of spectators. Moreover.
Mr. Ames shook hands with his trainer and
met the boys.

We got competition," Harve said,
and nodded toward Moreover.

Lonnie studied the big dog. "By Joe,
Harve! That used to be my dog. Is
that the old bias?"

"Yes, sir," Harve commanded.
"Don’t say it. It hurts the dog’s
feelings. Or so the boys say."

Ames understood. He had a son
at home and he watched with pride
and looked at him. "Mighty fine
dog, boys. ... If he beats Belle, I
might hire you, Lonnie, and fire your father.”

"He’s a heap better than Harve, but the boys
didn’t see him."

They took Moreover to the kennels.
They had fetched their own food, Text
to the kennel, where the farmer had
soon had a job doing kitchen chores.
Moreover’s rations were assured, and
the best. Lonnie bedded his dog down
carefully and combed him and tried to
make him look spruce. Moreover
would not be spruce. There was a
quizzical look in his eyes. The other
dogs looked straight at the others, but
Moreover looked up at the ground and
scratched his ears against the kennel box and
mussed himself up as fast as Lonnie cleaned
him. But he seemed to know that Lon-
nie expected something of him. All the
other dogs were yelping and were
nervous. But Moreover lay there, when
the dog jumped up, stood on his head, cocked it and began
eating. He ranged to the edge of the field
and worked in. He loped past a patch of
weeds, scratched his ears, and pointed, his
head cocked toward Moreover, his right
dog coiled and his tail still as a poker.

Then kept his dog on the point un-
til the judges had to order him to
stop. "He’s a heap of help," Text
said. "That’s a good dog, McNeil. He’s trained
beautifully. He’ll go to the finals with us,
sure as shooting."

Text was beaming with pride. "It
proves what I’ve always preached," Harve
said; "that a bird dog will work for a
man, if the man understands him.
I couldn’t do anything with that dog,
but he will go to hell and back for my
boy and Text.""
didn't discuss the contest with his son. He didn't want to make him nervous. He treated Lonnie as he would any other trainer. He knew that boys hate condescension from their fathers. He knew boys could sense condescension if adults cased up in games and that boys never want their fathers to make things too easy for them.

Harve took Silver Belle to the edge of a field of stubble, and she stood motionless as he snapped a tiny silver bell around her neck. He arose from his knees, petted her kindly and whispered, "Go 'em, girl."

The little pointer dashed into the stubble and soon was out of sight. Moreover rubbed against Lonnie's legs and waited for her to come out, then trotted along her path. There was no order between Lonnie and her dog, only understanding.

The men listened for the tingling of the silver bell that told them the champion still was casting. Through the brush the men shouted, their senses alert. Suddenly the bell muted.

Belle was on a point. The patient little animal was rigid. Her trim body was thrust forward, a bit, her nose perfectly tilted, was aimed toward a clump of sage. She didn't flinch a muscle. She might have been made of marble.

The judges nodded approval. Harve motioned to Belle. She took two steps, stopped, then turned, and howled. A roar of wings, a whistle of flight, and the covey of pheasants rose away like feathered lightning. Guns thundered.

Belle didn't bat an eye as the salvo cracked over her head. When the echoes died, she began fetching, and when the last bird was laid at Harve's feet, she dashed into the sage again, seeking the singles.

Lonnie had held Moreover while Belle worked. Now he turned the big dog loose. Moreover swung along through the sage at an easy gait. He cast a bit to the right, stuck his nose almost to the ground and found the trail Belle had just made. Then he broke into an easy trot as he depended on ground scents, but on body scents, and kept his nose high enough to catch any smells the wind blew his way.

About a hundred yards back up Belle's trail, Moreover suddenly broke his trot and eased his nose higher in the air. Then he jerked his head toward Lonnie and from out of the high, right leg came up swiftly, deliberately. He cocked his head in that strange fashion, and the quizzical, comical look came in his eyes. Moreover was a still hunter. He never waited for orders. He held the birds until Lonnie eked the safety off of his gun. When Moreover heard the click, he began creeping toward the covey. He didn't flinch as Belle began dropping the birds, and then, without orders, he fetched the dead birds and began casting for singles.

The judges whistled softly. "Most beautiful dog we ever saw," whispered one. Ames' face took on a worried look. So did Harve's. The big dog had picked up a covey right under Belle's nose.

Belle settled down to hunt. She seemed everywhere. She dashed to a point on the fringe of a cornfield, then held another covey while Harve wedged out in the first. She raced over the ridge, her nose picking up scents in almost impossible places. Moreover just loped along, but every time Belle got a covey, he would east for a few minutes, point, fetch and wait for her to set the pace. She was hunting because she was bored to hunt. He was hunting from habit and because Lonnie expected him to.

It was exasperating. Belle tried every trick of her training, but her skill was no match for his stamina. Her heart was pumping rapidly and she was tired when the men knocked off for lunch. Text ran back to the lodge to help fetch food to the field. He strutted into the kitchen and told the servants that Moreover was running Silver Belle ragged.

The servants shook their heads, and one told him that Mr. Ames would fire Harve if Moreover beat Belle. Text couldn't swallow his food. He waited around the fringe of hunters until he caught Lonnie's eye, and motioned to Ames.

"That Mr. Ames sho is a sutter," said Text, after he told his story. "He's worse'n Mr. Zeb. What we goin' do, Lon?"

Lonnie said, "He's half your dog, Text. What you say?"

"We can't let yo' paw get in no trouble on account of us, Lon. He got to have a job."

Lonnie nodded and hit his lip. He noticed that his father's face was drawn as the contest was renewed. Ames was nervous. The two men had worked for years to get Belle to perfection, and win the Grand National for the third time. And here an outcast dog was hunting her heart out at a minor meet. Lonnie thought his father was worried about his job and that Ames was angry.

His mind was made up. He watched Moreover leap across a creek, then race into a field of clover. He stopped, right behind him. Moreover came up to his point, jerked his head toward his master and waited.

Lonnie cupped his hands and said hoarsely, "Hep!" It was an order. Moreover never had heard. He turned and faced Lonnie. The judges gasped when the big dog left his point. Harve was puzzled.

Ames whispered, "He's breakin'. That good-for-nothing streak is cropping out."

"Hep!" Lonnie said it again. The judges didn't hear. Moreover deserted the covey and started for Belle. Lonnie shot out of his seat. Lonnie shouted, "Back to your point, you low-life biscuit eater!" Moreover tucked his tail between his legs and ran to the lodge and hid under it. Lonnie and Text followed him, without a word to the judges.

Ames looked at Harve for an explanation, and Harve said, "I don't get it. My son called his dog off. He quit."

It took Lonnie and Text a long time to coax Moreover from under the lodge. The dog crawled to Lonnie's feet and rolled over. Lonnie patted him, but Moreover didn't lick his face. The boys were with their dog in the kennel when the prize was awarded to Harve and Silver Belle.

"His feelings are hurt," Lonnie told Text as Moreover lay down and thumped his tail. "I'm sorry. I said it, Moreover. I had to.

Text said, "We sorry, puppy dog. But us had to, didn't we, Lon?"

They loaded the truck, and Harve had his boy sit on the front seat by him. They said good-by and rolled away.

Harve said to Lonnie, "How come you did that, son?"

Lonnie didn't reply, and the father didn't press the point. Finally, he said, "Don't ever quit, son, if you are winning or losing. It ain't fair to the dog."

"My dog is mad at me," Lonnie said. "We'll give him a beef heart when we get home. His feelings are hurt because you threw him down. But he'll be all right. Dogs are not like folks. They'll forgive a fellow."

He knew Lonnie had a reason for what he had done, and he knew that if his son wanted him to know the reason, he would tell him.

Back home, Lonnie cooked a beef heart for Moreover and took the plate to the back gallery where the dog was tied. Harve said, "Unite him, son. You can let him run free over here. You don't ever have to keep him over at Text's house, unless you want to."

He untied his dog and put the food before him. Moreover sniffed the food and toyed with it. He never had had such good food before. Lonnie and his father went back into the house.

After supper, Lonnie went to see about his dog. The meat hadn't been touched and Moreover was gone.

Harve said, "He probably gone back to Text's house."

Lonnie said, "I'm going after him."

"I'll go with you," said Harve, and got a lantern.

Text hadn't seen the dog. He joined the search and the three hunted through the woods for an hour or so, Lonnie whistling for Moreover, and calling him, "Heah, heah, fellow. Heah."

Harve sat on a stump, put the lantern down and called the boys to him. He had seen only a few dogs that would refuse to eat beef heart as Moreover had done.

(Continued on Page 116)
"Looka hooah!" Eben said. "I know my rights."

"I know mine," Harve said. "I always pay my debts, Eben. And I always collect them. I ain't got no cause to get riled because that dog stole poisoned eggs. You was mighty low-life to plant 'em, though. But two years ago you kicked one of my dogs."

"He burked at me and seared my team on the road," Eben said.

"A dog has a right to bark," Harve said, and reached up and grabbed Eben by the collar.

"I'll law you," Eben shouted.

Harve didn't reply. He slapped the man with his open palm, and when Harve squared off to fight, Harve knocked him down.

In the shadows of the woods, Lonnie whispered to Text. "What did I tell you? My papa ain't scared of nothing and he's God!"

They buried their dog near the branch. Text poured water in the grave. "I can't stand to think of him wanting to go hea when there's a heap of water so close. Reckon if he could have got to the ol' branch he could have washed out that poison? Reckon, Lon?"

"Maybe so."

They were walking to Lonnie's house. "My ol' bukeeye and you sweet-stinking mellow bug ain't helped us much, oh, Lon? Luck is plumb mad at us, ain't it, Lon?"

Lonnie waited at the gate until his father arrived. "Me and Text saw the fight," he said. "I won't tel mother. Women are cutters, ain't they, papa? Always trying to keep men folks from fighting."

"I'll give you boys another dog, son," Harve said. He peered into the darkness and saw a car parked behind his house, then hurried inside. Mr. Ames was warming himself by the fire and talking with Mrs. McNeil. She went to the kitchen to brew coffee, and left the men alone, after calling for Lonnie and Text to follow her.

Ames said, "I heard why your boy called his dog off. Call him and that little colored boy in here. I can't go back East with those boys thinking what they do of me."

Lonnie and Text stood by the fire and Ames said, "That story you heard about me isn't so. I wouldn't have fired this man if your dog had been. We were joking about it and the servants got the story all wrong. I just wanted you boys to know that."

Harve said, "Yes. But even if Mr. Ames would have fired me, it wouldn't have made any difference. You did what you thought was right, but we were wrong. Don't ever quit a race, once you start it."

Lonnie told Mr. Ames, "My dog is dead. I'm sorry I called him a biscuit eater. He wasn't. I just want you to know that."

Ames lit his pipe and passed his tobacco pouch to Harve. He saw Harve's bloody hand as the trainer accepted the tobacco.

"Ran into some briers," Harve said.

"Lot of them around here," Ames' eyes twinkled. "Just been thinking, Harve. I get some fine pups coming along. You need help down here. Better hire a couple of good men. Know where you can get two good hands? They get to be men who can lose without grumbling and win without crowing."

Harve looked at Lonnie and Text, and smiled. "I know where I can get a couple of good men."

"All right," said Ames, and shook hands all around. "I've got to be going. Good night, men."