

# Mrs. Teale

Ruth Paller

AS THEY reached the top of the beach steps, they saw him stretched out in the shade of the locust tree in front of the house, a mangy, tan German shepherd, blinking age-beared eyes at them.

"He's come back. Schnapps has come back, Mom," Timmy cried. "Mrs. Teale said he'd be home for something to eat."

"So he is, Timmy. You go on in the house and take your shower. I promised Mrs. Teale I'd get some dog food from her cottage and feed him if he came home before she did."

It had been before eight that morning when the landlady had knocked on the door of the rambling beach house she had rented to the Martins for the summer.

"The taxi is waiting to take me to work," she had apologized for waking them. "I can't find old Schnapps anywhere. It's too hot to leave his food outside." She handed Mrs. Martin a key. "If you see him before I get back, would you get his food from my place? I would so appreciate it."

She was dressed for town in a long-sleeved voile dress with large lavender dots. A wide pink straw hat, garlanded with fuchsias sat on her white pompadour. Her soft, creased old lady's face, hair, and hat were swathed in a lavender veil, tied on top of the flowers. She looked like a left-over Easter basket, Mrs. Martin thought.

Mrs. Teale made her way down the steps, then turned on the sidewalk. "I almost forgot. How is the poison-ivy acting?"

"Like poison-ivy," Mrs. Martin laughed ruefully. "It itches. I'm going to have the doctor give me another shot today."

Mrs. Teale shook her head. "I do wish you would let me read to you from Mary Eddy Baker tonight. I have helped so many folks with Science thinking. You must think health. Disease is not reality. Health and love—these are the realities."

The taxi honked.

"I must run," she said, flustered. "You won't forget Schnapps. He's all the folks I have. The Gro-pup is in the kitchen somewhere. I'm still not quite all put away after moving out of the big house yesterday."

"Don't worry. I'll find it," Mrs. Martin assured her.

"Thank you." The old lady climbed into the taxi, then put her head out the window. "Remember, think health, and it will be given to you."

\* \* \* \* \*

Mrs. Martin snapped her fingers and whistled, but the old dog paid no attention.

"Deaf too," she thought. "Well, I'll get the food ready and bring it out to him."

She fitted the key into the lock of the tiny cottage at the back of the yard. The door swung open to reveal a sitting room with drawn curtains. By the dim green light which filtered through, she could see how cramped the room was. The curved Victorian sofa, the mahogany library table, and the warped spinet desk were crowded against a mantelpiece as though shifted in the process of cleaning. But no cleaning had taken place. Dust coated the furniture and the boxes and papers piled on it. There were boxes everywhere, stacked in piles on the couch, on the tables, on the mantel—even in the fireplace opening. Two waist high stacks of newspapers stood by the window. Only one chair was cleared, a rose tapestry rocker, drawn up in front of the cluttered television set.

Through the open bedroom door, Mrs. Martin could see the unmade bed. On the floor was the box of shoes, Mrs. Teale had been carrying out of the big house when the Martins had driven up the day before.

Mrs. Martin pushed open the swinging door to the kitchen. A cloud of flies swarmed up from the sink where breakfast dishes and a frying pan soaked. On the drain-board, strawberry baskets and empty cottage cheese cartons were stacked. In the top carton, cantaloupe seeds were drying.

The kitchen table was covered with cartons—eggs, corn-flakes, noodle soup, process cheese, pancake mix, sugar, soap flakes, steel wool—the poor soul really hadn't had time to arrange her kitchen.

Finding no dog food on the table, Mrs. Martin examined the cabinet tops. There were cans and jars of soups and beans, peaches, apricots, milk, but no dog food. Mrs. Martin opened a cabinet. There it was. Four giant economy sized boxes of Gro-pup. But they were all empty. She saw that the shelves were crowded with opened cartons and cans. But there was nothing in any of them.

She chewed a finger-nail and looked thoughtfully toward the sitting room. Finally, she tossed her head and went back in. She opened the top box of the pile on the table. Inside, the tissue paper was neatly folded over—nothing. She opened six boxes in succession. All empty.

She brushed by a stack of newspapers and her elbow knocked off a foot high pile. She bent to pick them up and her eye was caught by a headline in the *Christian Science Monitor*—"Nazi Criminals Convicted." Good grief! That was ten years ago.

She shrugged in bewilderment and returned to her search for food for Schnapps. In the dark back entry, she thought she recognized another Gro-pup box. Starting toward it, she stubbed her toe on a large grey enamel pan, hard to see in the dimness. It was full of something. Tea bags. Hundreds of used Lipton tea bags, each with its tag attached.

She shivered with a sudden chill. Then she picked up the Gro-pup box and shook it. This was the one. Quickly she opened the door and stepped gratefully out into the sunlight.

## A Day at the Races

Lois H. Cole

AT LEAST they had been lucky to get such perfect weather for their day at the races, Ellen thought, even though she still wished they had never accepted Don Parker's invitation. Tom, as usual, was betting—and losing—more than he had any right to. Her eyes took in the colorfully crowded grandstand. It was an unusually warm day for early May. The brilliant sun pouring down from a cloudless sky heightened the contrast between dark-suited men and more vividly garbed women in crisp whites. There was a sprinkling of pastels, and the whole picture was punctuated here and there by a dash of red in a hat, a scarf, or a gay bunch of flowers. It was like a many-hued rainbow, mused Ellen, at the foot of which everyone there was hoping to find the proverbial pot of gold.

The Willoughby track was beautiful this time of year. Multi-colored tulips bloomed in horse-shoe-shaped flower beds opposite the grandstand behind the finish line. Other geometric plots of white candytuft, edged with pansies, interrupted the solid carpet of green turf in the center of the track. High-spouting fountains, surrounded by rocks interlaced with lavender creeping phlox, tossed their dancing water into the air to shimmer in a sparkling spray. As a team of work horses finished dragging a flat triangle of wood around the race track to smooth it before the next race, Ellen watched little eddies of dust rise briefly in the gentle breeze and then settle back into the smooth tan strip of earth.

"They're off!" yelled Tom Grennan excitedly, as the little doors flew open in the barricade starting gate and the horses catapulted forward like so many toys whose springs had suddenly been released. "Now come on, Brigadoon, you're my baby!"