

"Don't let him come near ~~me~~ He'll throw his quills at me!" whined a fluffy, hysterical person as she flounced away from a round, hairy little ball, with a blunt velvety nose and small ~~black~~ black eyes. He was merely another waif that had come to live with us. But he didn't look much like a waif. He was not lean or hungry, and he certainly had no inferior ^{ity} complex. At the time he was the center of the household eyes, and was unconcernedly waddling about the study on his short elbows like a little bear, sniffing at all the strange objects, chair legs- and others- bookcases and ~~and~~ especially the woodlift. The woodlift received especial inspections. After smelling and rubbing against all the other reachable objects, he invariably returned to the woodlift, and finally crawled in among the sticks, took a few baby bites of bark, for his teeth were in the infantile stage also, ^{His head under his stomach,} curled up in a ball in a dark ^{turned his round back to the world,} corner and went sound asleep. He seemed as contented as if he were out in the woods, or the wild expanse of rolling sagebrush, which should have been his natural home.

Of course, he had never known the semi-desert, alkali region east of the Cascades where he was born, for he had barely opened his eyes when a ^{Beloved Sissy Hunter} trapper found him and shipped him to Portland. He had hardly gotten acquainted with his own mother, a bulky, ungainly personage with an ugly visage and an outer coat of long gray hairs concealing a panoply of vicious spines. ^{is} For Dinty, 2d ~~was~~ a scion of the porcupine family, called the "fretful" race of rodents. Erethizon is his ^{scientific} ~~official~~ name.

We thought that old hoax about porcupines throwing their quills had outlived itself in these times when the animal has become better known. But it still persists in some kinds of heads, and it has been brought to light on several chance occasions lately since Dinty arrived. Here is the grain of truth in the traditional chaff that the porcupine throws its quills as it stands on the defensive, or let's fly arrows as it retreats from its pursuers. In ^{This woods child} ~~this creature the spines are~~ ^{has spines} very short, ~~only~~ about an inch long, but sharp and ^{very}

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story goes that he looking,
jagged at the point. The animal is slow, clumsy, and sullen, and when captured makes no show of resistance beyond gathering ^{himself} in a heap, with the head and ^{legs} limbs drawn in as far as possible, and the back high-arched like ~~that~~ of an angry cat. The spiny tract is chiefly on the lower back and upper surface of the broad, lumpish tail. The ^{big tail} ~~latter~~ ^{his} is the main weapon of defense. While the animal seems passive, ^{he} it is all the while watching keenly the enemy, waiting for a chance to let fly. Should one come incautiously near him, he will probably feel hurt before he has time to discover that numerous quills are sticking in his clothes and person. There has been a vicious flirt of the tail- a peculiar, jerky slap- as if the thorny member worked on a spring hinge. Repeated thrashings of the tail, quick as a flash, betray ^{his} ~~its~~ irritation. After the melee ^{some} ~~many~~ of the quills ^{may} ~~lie~~ scattered on the ground, having been flung out in the convulsive action.

One visitor who came out to see Dinty asked how this method of defense for porcupines came about. Some time in the far ages back of all of us when even more animals ate their fellow beasts, the porcupine must have found himself the butt of a bad deal from Mother Nature. Round and heavy of body, with short, slow legs, a big soft nose that couldn't court collision, and a juicy fat back covered only with long hairs, he found himself vulnerable to any hungry marauder that came along. History says that Mother Nature gradually repaired her neglect of this creature's needs for self-protection by stiffening the long hairs on the back and tail into quills, or at least growing a different kind of hair- for hair it is- so that now in this age Porky never has to run from an enemy, or even hurry in life at all. He merely ducks his head and pulls the quill controls. ^{on his back.} He has worked up a useful system of hair-trigger muscular defense.

All this seems to be a doubtful alibi for Dinty, ~~as a household pet.~~
And it seems to me ^{a little} unfair and ^{only a half truth.} mostly on the wrong side. Over a period of ²⁵ ~~many~~ years I have met many ¹ wild, full-grown Dintys in the woods from Alaska to the Yellowstone Park

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region, and ~~(all down the Pacific Coast,)~~ and have taken pictures of them at close hand without any previous introduction. I ^{have} had never had one slap his tail even at close range. The general run of people who meet ^{this} ~~these~~ animals outdoors usually begin to pester or tease ~~them~~ ^{him} or throw sticks and injure him if possible. The usual hunter will raise ^{his} gun and pop him off, and he falls with a dull thud, an inoffensive victim to thoughtlessness. In the wilderness regions of the Northwest he is protected by ^{common consent} ~~law~~ because he may chance to provide a mulligan stew for hunters and lost travelers. In some forest regions he may be a menace to young trees, but it can't be very great. The growth of his population is certainly not alarming.

As a household pet, he is a great find. The first Dinty we had lived with us for over a year, and in ^{his} ~~the~~ second summer roamed away along the bottoms of the Willamette River, where he must have been disappointed in finding a mate, as porcupines are not common ~~in this region~~ west of the mountains. Dinty, 2d is about ^{six} ~~four~~ months old, two of which he spent in his little cage in our study. For ~~most~~ ^{the} most of the summer he has been living about the place, helping himself to the lettuce, cabbage and other vegetables in the garden. He spends a good deal of his time sleeping down in the woods below the house, for the daytime is his night. He is a nocturnal animal. About ^{dusk} ~~eight o'clock~~ he meanders up the hill and comes around to the study door, scratching to be let in. When he enters, ~~xxxxxxxx~~ the lighted room with the family around the fireplace, he is in anything but a "fretful" mood. He becomes coy and ~~xxxxxxxx~~ self-conscious; stretches his mouth with a comical grin, showing the long, yellow teeth. ^{And} then he begins the porcupine dance, whirling around on his stubby legs like a clumsy little elephant, and crooning softly. ^{all at once, when he came for breakfast,} ~~Then he remembers something - his bottle of milk.~~ He ambles over to one of us sitting in a rockingchair, ~~and~~ stands up, putting his paws on a knee, and begins to beg. ^{The sight of his} ~~His~~ bottle, composed of one-third cream and two-thirds warm water and a little brown sugar, sets him to dancing again. ^{And} He talks softly all through the process of getting away with it.

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When he finishes it, he is handed a slice of bread, ^{which} and he takes ~~it~~ in his hands, sits up and munches till it is gone. Several slices may follow, after which he knows he is full. He sprawls out full length with his feet out behind, and lies as if asleep. Or he crawls up into a lap, pokes his head under an arm, and the person can go on ~~with his~~ reading ^{his} evening newspaper.

350
1050
75
1125 words



ROBERTSON'S COMPANION

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