THE RENEGADE

It was eight-twenty in the morning. The twins were loitering over their cereal, and Mrs. Walpole, with one eye on the clock and the other on the kitchen window past which the school bus would come in a matter of minutes, felt the unreasonable irritation that comes with being late on a school morning, the wading-through-molasses feeling of trying to hurry children.

"You'll have to walk," she said ominously, for perhaps the third time. "The bus won't wait."

"I'm hurrying," Judy said. She regarded her full glass of milk smugly. "I'm closer to through than Jack."

Jack pushed his glass across the table and they measured meticulously, precisely. "No," he said. "Look how much more you have than me."

"It doesn't *matter*," Mrs. Walpole said, "it doesn't *matter*. Jack, *eat* your cereal."

"She didn't have any more than me to start with," Jack said. "Did she have any more than me, Mom?"

The alarm clock had not gone off at seven as it should.

Mrs. Walpole heard the sound of the shower upstairs and calculated rapidly; the coffee was slower than usual this morning, the boiled eggs a shade too soft. She had only had time to pour herself a glass of fruit juice and no time to drink it. *Someone*—Judy or Jack or Mr. Walpole—was going to be late.

"Judy," Mrs. Walpole said mechanically, *"Jack."*

Judy's hair was not accurately braided. Jack would get off without his handkerchief. Mr. Walpole would certainly be irritable.

The yellow-and-red bulk of the school bus filled the road outside the kitchen window, and Judy and Jack streaked for the door, cereal uneaten, books most likely forgotten. Mrs. Walpole followed them to the kitchen door, calling, "Jack, your milk money; come straight home at noon." She watched them climb into the school bus and then went briskly to work clearing their dishes from the table and setting a place for Mr. Walpole. She would have to have breakfast herself later, in the breathing-spell that came after nine o'clock. That meant her wash would be late getting on the line, and if it rained that afternoon, as it certainly might, nothing would be dry. Mrs. Walpole made an effort, and said, "Good morning, dear," as her husband came into the kitchen. He said, "Morning," without glancing up and Mrs. Walpole, her mind full of unfinished sentences that began, "Don't you think other people ever have any feelings or—" started patiently to set his breakfast before him. The soft-boiled eggs in their dish, the toast, the coffee. Mr. Walpole devoted himself to his paper, and Mrs. Walpole, who wanted desperately also to say, "I don't suppose you notice that I haven't had a chance to eat—" set the dishes down as softly as she could.

Everything was going smoothly, although half-an-hour

late, when the telephone rang. The Walpoles were on a party line, and Mrs. Walpole usually let the phone ring her number twice before concluding that it was really their number; this morning, before nine o'clock, with Mr. Walpole not half-through his breakfast, it was an unbearable intrusion, and Mrs. Walpole went reluctantly to answer it. "Hello," she said forbiddingly.

"Mrs. Walpole," the voice said, and Mrs. Walpole said, "Yes?" The voice—it was a woman—said, "I'm sorry to bother you, but this is—" and gave an unrecognizable name. Mrs. Walpole said, "Yes?" again. She could hear Mr. Walpole taking the coffeepot off the stove to pour himself a second cup.

"Do you have a dog? Brown-and-black hound?" the voice continued. With the word *dog* Mrs. Walpole, in the second before she answered, "Yes," comprehended the innumerable aspects of owning a dog in the country (six dollars for spaying, the rude barking late at night, the watchful security of the dark shape sleeping on the rug beside the double-decker beds in the twins' room, the inevitability of a dog in the house, as important as a stove, or a front porch, or a subscription to the local paper; more, and above any of these things, the dog herself, known among the neighbors as Lady Walpole, on an exact par with Jack Walpole or Judy Walpole; quiet, competent, exceedingly tolerant), and found in none of them a reason for such an early morning call from a voice which she realized now was as irritable as her own.

"Yes," Mrs. Walpole said shortly, "I own a dog. Why?"

"Big brown-and-black hound?"

Lady's pretty markings, her odd face. "Yes," Mrs. Walpole said, her voice a little more impatient, "yes, that is certainly my dog. Why?"

"He's been killing my chickens." The voice sounded satisfied now; Mrs. Walpole had been cornered.

For several seconds Mrs. Walpole was quiet, so that the voice said, "Hello?"

"That's perfectly ridiculous," Mrs. Walpole said.

"This morning," the voice said with relish, "your dog was chasing our chickens. We heard the chickens at about eight o'clock, and my husband went out to see what was the matter and found two chickens dead and he saw a big brown-and-black hound down with the chickens and he took a stick and chased the dog away and then he found two more dead ones. He says," the voice went on flatly, "that it's lucky he didn't think to take his shotgun out with him because you wouldn't have any more dog. Most awful mess you ever saw," the voice said, "blood and feathers everywhere."

"What makes you think it's *my* dog?" Mrs. Walpole said weakly.

"Joe White—he's a neighbor of yours—was passing at the time and saw my husband chasing the dog. Said it was your dog."

Old man White lived in the next house but one to the Walpoles. Mrs. Walpole had always made a point of being courteous to him, inquired amiably about his health when she saw him on the porch as she passed, had regarded respectfully the pictures of his grandchildren in Albany.

"I see," Mrs. Walpole said, suddenly shifting her ground. "Well, if you're absolutely *sure*. I just can't believe it of Lady. She's so gentle."

The other voice softened, in response to Mrs. Walpole's concern. "It *is* a shame," the other woman said. "I can't tell you how sorry I am that it happened. But . . ." her voice trailed off significantly.

"Of *course* we'll take care of the damage," Mrs. Walpole said quickly.

"No, no," the woman said, almost apologetically. "Don't even *think* about it."

"But of *course*—" Mrs. Walpole began, bewildered.

"The dog," the voice said. "You'll have to do something about the dog."

A sudden unalterable terror took hold of Mrs. Walpole. Her morning had gone badly, she had not yet had her coffee, she was faced with an evil situation she had never known before, and now the voice, its tone, its inflection, had managed to frighten Mrs. Walpole with a word like "something."

"How?" Mrs. Walpole said finally. "I mean, what do you want me to do?"

There was a brief silence on the other end of the wire, and then the voice said briskly, "I'm sure I don't know, missus. I've always heard that there's no way to stop a chicken-killing dog. As I say, there was no damage to speak of. As a matter of fact, the chickens the dog killed are plucked and in the oven now."

Mrs. Walpole's throat tightened and she closed her eyes for a minute, but the voice went inflexibly on. "We wouldn't ask you to do anything except take care of the dog. Naturally, you understand that we can't have a dog killing our chickens?"

Realizing that she was expected to answer, Mrs. Walpole said, "Certainly."

"So . . ." the voice said.

Mrs. Walpole saw over the top of the phone that Mr. Walpole was passing her on his way to the door. He waved briefly to her and she nodded at him. He was late; she had intended to ask him to stop at the library in the city. Now she would have to call him later. Mrs. Walpole said sharply into the phone, "First of all, of course, I'll have to make sure it's my dog. If it *is* my dog I can promise you you'll have no more trouble."

"It's your dog all right." The voice had assumed the country flatness; if Mrs. Walpole wanted to fight, the voice implied, she had picked just the right people.

"Good-bye," Mrs. Walpole said, knowing that she was making a mistake in parting from this woman angrily; knowing that she should stay on the phone for an interminable apologetic conversation, try to beg her dog's life back from this stupid inflexible woman who cared so much for *her* stupid chickens.

Mrs. Walpole put the phone down and went out into the kitchen. She poured herself a cup of coffee and made herself some toast.

I am not going to let this bother me until after I have had my coffee, Mrs. Walpole told herself firmly. She put extra butter on her toast and tried to relax, moving her back against the chair, letting her shoulders sag. Feeling like this at nine-thirty in the morning, she thought, it's a feeling that belongs with eleven o'clock at night. The bright sun outside was not as cheerful as it might be; Mrs. Walpole decided suddenly to put her wash off until tomorrow. They had not lived in the country town long enough for Mrs. Walpole to feel the disgrace of washing on Tuesday as mortal; they were still city folk and would probably always be city folk, people who owned a chicken-killing dog, people who washed on Tuesday, people who were not able to fend for themselves against the limited world of earth and food and weather that the country folk took so much for granted. In this situation as in all such others—the disposal of rubbish, the weather stripping, the baking of angel-food

cake—Mrs. Walpole was forced to look for advice. In the country it is extremely difficult to "get a man" to do things for you, and Mr. and Mrs. Walpole had early fallen into the habit of consulting their neighbors for information which in the city would have belonged properly to the superintendent, or the janitor, or the man from the gas company. When Mrs. Walpole's glance fell on Lady's water dish under the sink, and she realized that she was indescribably depressed, she got up and put on her jacket and a scarf over her head and went next door.

Mrs. Nash, her next-door neighbor, was frying doughnuts, and she waved a fork at Mrs. Walpole at the open door and called, "Come in, can't leave the stove." Mrs. Walpole, stepping into Mrs. Nash's kitchen, was painfully aware of her own kitchen with the dirty dishes in the sink. Mrs. Nash was wearing a shockingly clean house dress and her kitchen was freshly washed; Mrs. Nash was able to fry doughnuts without making any sort of a mess.

"The men do like fresh doughnuts with their lunch," Mrs. Nash remarked without any more preamble than her nod and invitation to Mrs. Walpole. "I always try to get enough made ahead, but I never do."

"I wish I could make doughnuts," Mrs. Walpole said. Mrs. Nash waved the fork hospitably at the stack of still-warm doughnuts on the table and Mrs. Walpole helped herself to one, thinking: This will give me indigestion.

"Seems like they all get eaten by the time I finish making them," Mrs. Nash said. She surveyed the cooking doughnuts and then, satisfied that she could look away for a minute, took one herself and began to eat it standing by the stove. "What's wrong with you?" she asked. "You look sort of peaked this morning."

"To tell you the truth," Mrs. Walpole said, "it's our dog.

Someone called me this morning that she's been killing chickens."

Mrs. Nash nodded. "Up to Harris'," she said. "I know."

Of course she'd know by now, Mrs. Walpole thought.

"You know," Mrs. Nash said, turning again to the doughnuts, "they do say there's nothing to do with a dog kills chickens. My brother had a dog once killed sheep, and I don't know *what* they didn't do to break that dog, but of course nothing would do it. Once they get the taste of blood." Mrs. Nash lifted a golden doughnut delicately out of the frying kettle, and set it down on a piece of brown paper to drain. "They get so's they'd rather kill than eat, hardly."

"But what can I *do*?" Mrs. Walpole asked. "Isn't there *anything*?"

"You can try, of course," Mrs. Nash said. "Best thing to do first is tie her up. Keep her tied, with a good stout chain. Then at least she won't go chasing no more chickens for a while, save you getting her killed *for* you."

Mrs. Walpole got up reluctantly and began to put her scarf on again. "I guess I'd better get a chain down at the store," she said.

"You going downstreet?"

"I want to do my shopping before the kids come home for lunch."

"Don't buy any store doughnuts," Mrs. Nash said. "I'll run up later with a dishful for you. You get a good stout chain for that dog."

"Thank you," Mrs. Walpole said. The bright sunlight across Mrs. Nash's kitchen doorway, the solid table bearing its plates of doughnuts, the pleasant smell of the frying, were all symbols somehow of Mrs. Nash's safety, her confidence in a way of life and a security that had no traffic

with chicken-killing, no city fears, an assurance and cleanliness so great that she was willing to bestow its overflow on the Walpoles, bring them doughnuts and overlook Mrs. Walpole's dirty kitchen. "Thank you," Mrs. Walpole said again, inadequately.

"You tell Tom Kittredge I'll be down for a pork roast later this morning," Mrs. Nash said. "Tell him to save it for me."

"I shall." Mrs. Walpole hesitated in the doorway and Mrs. Nash waved the fork at her.

"See you later," Mrs. Nash said.

Old man White was sitting on his front porch in the sun. When he saw Mrs. Walpole he grinned broadly and shouted to her, "Guess you're not going to have any more dog."

I've got to be nice to him, Mrs. Walpole thought, he's not a traitor or a bad man by country standards; anyone would tell on a chicken-killing dog; but he doesn't have to be so pleased about it, she thought, and tried to make her voice pleasant when she said, "Good morning, Mr. White."

"Gonna have her shot?" Mr. White asked. "Your man got a gun?"

"I'm so worried about it," Mrs. Walpole said. She stood on the walk below the front porch and tried not to let her hatred show in her face as she looked up at Mr. White.

"It's too bad about a dog like that," Mr. White said.

At least he doesn't blame *me*, Mrs. Walpole thought. "Is there anything I can do?" she said.

Mr. White thought. "Believe you might be able to cure a chicken-killer," he said. "You get a dead chicken and tie it around the dog's neck, so he can't shake it loose, see?"

"Around her neck?" Mrs. Walpole asked, and Mr. White nodded, grinning toothlessly.

"See, when he can't shake it loose at first he tries to play with it and then it starts to bother him, see, and then he tries to roll it off and it won't come and then he tries to bite it off and it won't come and then when he sees it won't come he thinks he's never gonna get rid of it, see, and he gets scared. And then you'll have him coming around with his tail between his legs and this thing hanging around his neck and it gets worse and worse."

Mrs. Walpole put one hand on the porch railing to steady herself. "What do you do then?" she asked.

"Well," Mr. White said, "the way I heard it, see, the chicken gets riper and riper and the more the dog sees it and feels it and smells it, see, the more he gets to hate chicken. And he can't ever get rid of it, see?"

"But the dog," Mrs. Walpole said. "Lady, I mean. How long do we have to leave it around her neck?"

"Well," Mr. White said with enthusiasm, "I guess you leave it on until it gets ripe enough to fall off by itself. See, the head . . ."

"I see," Mrs. Walpole said. "Would it work?"

"Can't say," Mr. White said. "Never tried it myself." His voice said that *he* had never had a chicken-killing dog.

Mrs. Walpole left him abruptly; she could not shake the feeling that if it were not for Mr. White, Lady would not have been identified as the dog killing the chickens; she wondered briefly if Mr. White had maliciously blamed Lady because they were city folk, and then thought, No, no man around here would bear false witness against a dog.

When she entered the grocery it was almost empty; there was a man at the hardware counter and another man leaning against the meat counter talking to Mr. Kittredge, the grocer. When Mr. Kittredge saw Mrs. Walpole come in he called across the store, "Morning, Mrs. Walpole. Fine day."

"Lovely," Mrs. Walpole said, and the grocer said, "Bad luck about the dog."

"I don't know what to do about it," Mrs. Walpole said, and the man talking to the grocer looked at her reflectively, and then back at the grocer.

"Killed three chickens up to Harris's this morning," the grocer said to the man and the man nodded solemnly and said, "Heard about that."

Mrs. Walpole came across to the meat counter and said, "Mrs. Nash said would you save her a roast of pork. She'll be down later to get it."

"Going up that way," the man standing with the grocer said. "Drop it off."

"Right," the grocer said.

The man looked at Mrs. Walpole and said, "Gonna have to shoot him, I guess?"

"I hope not," Mrs. Walpole said earnestly. "We're all so fond of the dog."

The man and the grocer looked at one another for a minute, and then the grocer said reasonably, "Won't do to have a dog going around killing chickens, Mrs. Walpole."

"First thing you know," the man said, "someone'll put a load of buckshot into him, he won't come home no more." He and the grocer both laughed.

"Isn't there any way to cure the dog?" Mrs. Walpole asked.

"Sure," the man said. "Shoot him."

"Tie a dead chicken around his neck," the grocer suggested. "That might do it."

"Heard of a man did that," the other man said.

"Did it help?" Mrs. Walpole asked eagerly.

The man shook his head slowly and with determination.

"You know," the grocer said. He leaned his elbow on the meat counter; he was a great talker. "You know," he said again, "my father had a dog once used to eat eggs. Got into the chicken-house and used to break the eggs open and lick them up. Used to eat maybe half the eggs we got."

"That's a bad business," the other man said. "Dog eating eggs."

"Bad business," the grocer said in confirmation. Mrs. Walpole found herself nodding. "Last, my father couldn't stand it no more. Here half his eggs were getting eaten," the grocer said. "So he took an egg once, set it on the back of the stove for two, three days, till the egg got good and ripe, good and hot through, and that egg smelled pretty bad. Then—I was there, boy twelve, thirteen years old—he called the dog one day, and the dog come running. So I held the dog, and my daddy opened the dog's mouth and put in the egg, red-hot and smelling to heaven, and then he held the dog's mouth closed so's the dog couldn't get rid of the egg anyway except swallow it." The grocer laughed and shook his head reminiscently.

"Bet that dog never ate another egg," the man said.

"Never touched another egg," the grocer said firmly. "You put an egg down in front of that dog, he'd run's though the devil was after him."

"But how did he feel about you?" Mrs. Walpole asked. "Did he ever come near *you* again?"

The grocer and the other man both looked at her. "How do you mean?" the grocer said.

"Did he ever *like* you again?"

"Well," the grocer said, and thought. "No," he said finally, "I don't believe you could say's he ever did. Not much of a dog, though."

"There's one thing you ought to try," the other man said suddenly to Mrs. Walpole, "you really want to cure that dog, there's one thing you ought to try."

"What's that?" Mrs. Walpole said.

"You want to take that dog," the man said, leaning forward and gesturing with one hand, "take him and put him in a pen with a mother hen's got chicks to protect. Time she's through with him he won't never chase another chicken."

The grocer began to laugh and Mrs. Walpole looked, bewildered, from the grocer to the other man, who was looking at her without a smile, his eyes wide and yellow, like a cat's.

"What would happen?" she asked uncertainly.

"Scratch his eyes out," the grocer said succinctly. "He wouldn't ever be able to *see* another chicken."

Mrs. Walpole realized that she felt faint. Smiling over her shoulder, in order not to seem discourteous, she moved quickly away from the meat counter and down to the other end of the store. The grocer continued talking to the man behind the meat counter and after a minute Mrs. Walpole went outside, into the air. She decided that she would go home and lie down until nearly lunchtime, and do her shopping later in the day.

At home she found that she could not lie down until the breakfast table was cleared and the dishes washed, and by the time she had done that it was almost time to start lunch. She was standing by the pantry shelves, debating, when a dark shape crossed the sunlight in the doorway and she realized that Lady was home. For a minute she stood still, watching Lady. The dog came in quietly, harmlessly, as though she had spent the morning frolicking on the grass with her friends, but there were spots of blood on her legs and she drank her water eagerly. Mrs. Walpole's first impulse was to scold her, to hold her down and beat her for the deliberate, malicious pain she had inflicted, the murderous brutality a pretty dog like Lady could keep so well hidden in their home; then Mrs. Walpole, watching Lady go quietly and settle down in her usual spot by the stove,

turned helplessly and took the first cans she found from the pantry shelves and brought them to the kitchen table.

Lady sat quietly by the stove until the children came in noisily for lunch, and then she leaped up and jumped on them, welcoming them as though they were the aliens and she the native to the house. Judy, pulling Lady's ears, said, "Hello, Mom, do you know what Lady did? You're a bad bad dog," she said to Lady, "you're going to get shot."

Mrs. Walpole felt faint again and set a dish down hastily on the table. "Judy Walpole," she said.

"She *is*, Mom," Judy said. "She's going to get shot."

Children don't realize, Mrs. Walpole told herself, death is never real to them. Try to be sensible, she told herself. "Sit down to lunch, children," she said quietly.

"But, *Mother*," Judy said, and Jack said, "She *is*, Mom."

They sat down noisily, unfolding their napkins and attacking their food without looking at it, eager to talk.

"You *know* what Mr. Shepherd said, Mom?" Jack demanded, his mouth full.

"Listen," Judy said, "we'll tell you what he said."

Mr. Shepherd was a genial man who lived near the Walpoles and gave the children nickels and took the boys fishing. "He says Lady's going to get shot," Jack said.

"But the spikes," Judy said. "Tell about the spikes."

"The *spikes*," Jack said. "Listen, Mommy. He says you got to get a collar for Lady. . . ."

"A strong collar," Judy said.

"And you get big thick nails, like spikes, and you hammer them into the collar."

"All around," Judy said. "Let *me* tell it, Jack. You hammer these nails all around so's they make spikes inside the collar."

"But it's loose," Jack said. "Let *me* tell this part. It's loose and you put it around Lady's neck. . . ."

"And—" Judy put her hand on her throat and made a strangling noise.

"Not *yet*," Jack said. "Not *yet*, dopey. First you get a long long long long rope."

"A *real* long rope," Judy amplified.

"And you fasten it to the collar and then we put the collar on Lady," Jack said. Lady was sitting next to him and he leaned over and said, "Then we put this real sharp spiky collar around your neck," and kissed the top of her head while Lady regarded him affectionately.

"And then we take her where there are chickens," Judy said, "and we show her the chickens, and we turn her loose."

"And make her chase the chickens," Jack said. "And *then*, and then, when she gets right up close to the chickens, we puuuuuuull on the rope—"

"And—" Judy made her strangling noise again.

"The spikes cut her head off," Jack finished dramatically.

They both began to laugh and Lady, looking from one to the other, panted as though she were laughing too.

Mrs. Walpole looked at them, at her two children with their hard hands and their sunburned faces laughing together, their dog with blood still on her legs laughing with them. She went to the kitchen doorway to look outside at the cool green hills, the motion of the apple tree in the soft afternoon breeze.

"Cut your head right off," Jack was saying.

Everything was quiet and lovely in the sunlight, the peaceful sky, the gentle line of the hills. Mrs. Walpole closed her eyes, suddenly feeling the harsh hands pulling her down, the sharp points closing in on her throat.

After You, My Dear Alphonse

Mrs. Wilson was just taking the gingerbread out of the oven when she heard Johnny outside talking to someone.

"Johnny," she called, "you're late. Come in and get your lunch."

"Just a minute, Mother," Johnny said. "After you, my dear Alphonse."

"After *you*, my dear Alphonse," another voice said.

"No, after *you*, my dear Alphonse," Johnny said.

Mrs. Wilson opened the door. "Johnny," she said, "you come in this minute and get your lunch. You can play after you've eaten."

Johnny came in after her, slowly. "Mother," he said, "I brought Boyd home for lunch with me."

"Boyd?" Mrs. Wilson thought for a moment. "I don't believe I've met Boyd. Bring him in, dear, since you've invited him. Lunch is ready."

"Boyd!" Johnny yelled. "Hey, Boyd, come on in!"

"I'm coming. Just got to unload this stuff."

"Well, hurry, or my mother'll be sore."