IN THE SPIRIT OF MEEKNESS
By Mrs. Paul E. King

The moon came up over the mountain and Fred Calley, sitting in his front room, as Myrna and he always called their living room, watched its silvery beams make a moon path across the worn carpet in the room. Myrna had gone to bed an hour ago but Fred had some thinking to do and he seemed to think best in the quiet of a dark room, lighted only by the pale lamp of a moon.
The phone call had disturbed him, to be sure, but what disturbed him even more was the fact that he knew Hoppy did not kill Mrs. Hammer's chickens. He was sure of that. But what did kill them, he wondered, and how were they killed? The neighbor said Brady Miller had told her; said Brady saw the dog do it. And besides, Brady knew for sure it was Hoppy because the tracks in the snow were the tracks of a three-legged dog.

Fred scratched his brow thoughtfully and ran work-worn fingers through the rapidly thinning hair on his head, the way he always did when solutions to mind-boggling questions eluded him. Then he bowed his head and prayed for wisdom and help and guidance in the situation.

His mind went back to the day when the three-legged frisky beagle pup was brought to the house by a friend of his. Did he want the pup? his friend had asked, knowing of his sympathy and compassion and kindness to crippled or injured animals, birds and whatever.

The pup had injured the leg in an accident, and though his friend had taken the little fellow to a vet there was nothing that could be done to save the paw. The pup came through the ordeal in super-good shape, albeit minus a portion of his left hind leg.

The leg healed over fast, and Hoppy, as he quite naturally came to be called, was as lively and as frisky and playful as were his two brothers and two sisters. The strength in his good, right leg seemed to have increased after the partial amputation of the other. And from the moment Fred and Myrna laid eyes upon the beautiful little pup they loved him; he became a part of them and of their lives.

Hoppy was as obedient to their orders, given in love and kindness, as an obedient child. He was good for them, Fred mused silently now. He recalled how very intelligent the little fellow was right from his young puppy days. He brought his dish into the kitchen for Myrna to see -- and to fill -- whenever it was empty and, each day, sitting inside the screen door, he waited for the sound of the paper man's car, then he would whine and hop around until he was let out the door. He delighted in retrieving the tossed paper and bringing it back to the house to his owners.
Hoppy chased nothing but rabbits. He was a beagle whose mother had out-performed every trial she'd been entered in. Pups from her certainly had the genes to be great ones. As a rabbit finder and trailer there was none better than Hoppy's mother. Hoppy was a rabbit dog through and through!

Something pulled at Fred's heart now as he thought of the faithful dog whose loyalty and devotion to both Myrna and himself exceeded anything he had ever seen or known. With his own crippled leg, Fred realized they were good for each other; Hoppy's speed was just about right, out on the trail, for him.

Tears stung his eyes as he recalled Mrs. Hammer's conversation: "You'll get over here and pay for my dead chickens, Fred Calley, and you'll have that dog killed or I'll do something about it!" She all but shouted it into the telephone.

"Lord, something's not right, but I can't exactly put my finger on what it is." Fred talked to the Lord in a trusting and personally-quiet way. "Brady said. . . ."

Brady! Oh, that was a part of the puzzle, if not the puzzle in its entirety.

Fred recalled that late evening less than a month before. Brady was riding his motor bike down the highway. He took a shortcut across Myrna's prized rose bed, digging up dirt and mulch and tearing up the bed and some of the roses as he raced through. He, Fred, had stopped Brady and in a kind voice had told him not to do that again, mentioning that the rose bed was Myrna's special delight and joy.

Brady had looked sullen, Fred now recalled, almost angry, even. Revving the motor up loudly, he had driven away acting like the world was his and he would do as he wanted to do.

Fred listened as the mantel clock struck ten clear, melodic notes. If it were not for the lateness of the hour he would have gone by to pay Brady a visit. Brady held the key to the chicken killing story on Hoppy, he was sure.

Satisfied that he had the answer, Fred walked over to the window and peered out at the beautiful sky bedecked with stars and the moon. Then, thanking God for His help and guidance, he went to bed.
The following morning Fred donned jacket, cap, gloves and boots and drove over toward the Miller place. He wanted to talk to Brady when neither parent was home. It was only a short distance away, but the weather was cold and he figured it would be better to drive by slowly and check to make sure that Brady's father had gone to feed the cattle on his other farm some distance away, and that Mrs. Miller had left to give one of their ailing neighbor women her physical therapy for the day.

Seeing that the car and the truck were gone, Fred pulled up in front of the house and hurried to the door. Within an hour, both parents would be home; he wanted to see Brady alone.

Marie Ann met him at the door with a broad smile. "You're out early, aren't you, Mr. Calley?" she asked. "I saw you coming. Come in; it's cold out there. Dad's over feeding the cattle and Mother's helping out with Mrs. Crissman's therapy. How about some breakfast?"

"Thanks, Marie Ann. Thanks much, but I don't care for breakfast. I came to see Brady. . . ."

"He's doodling around again, Mr. Calley. Wait till I find him. Mother nearly has herself in an emotional frenzy trying to get Brady around for school each morning. I'll get him. Please have a chair. . . ."

Marie Ann returned in a little while with Brady trailing behind her.

"Thanks, Marie Ann," Fred said. Then, looking at Brady, he said, " 'Morning, Brady. Mind if you and I have a little chat together?"

Brady's face turned scarlet, then the color seemed to drain out as rapidly as it had entered.

"Is it all right if Brady and I go into the living room to talk?" Fred asked, addressing Marie Ann. "Sure is, Mr. Calley. Go right in."

"Thanks," Fred said, giving Marie Ann a warm smile.
Fred motioned Brady to a chair close to the one in which he sat. "I'm here about Mrs. Hammer's chickens," he began, watching Brady's face carefully. "I understand you said you saw Hoppy kill the chickens."

Fred paused for a while; his eyes never left Brady's face. The boy looked frightened; terribly so.

"Somebody killed those chickens, Brady. I said somebody, not some dog; not Hoppy. Somebody, Brady. Would you know who that somebody might be?"

Brady's eyes were blurring from a well of suppressed tears. Fred knew he had struck paydirt and went on:

"A certain young fellow I know has a motor bike and every once in a while he drives it on the public road. That's a violation, seeing as how he's not 16. Now, I wouldn't want to get a fellow into serious trouble, and I won't if he stops cutting through a certain rose bed and promises to stay off the public highways. And I won't say a word to anyone's parents about dead chickens either. I'll pay the damages for those if a certain young fellow agrees to tell Mrs. Hammer the truth about the matter. I'd sure hate to see this fine young man lose his soul and burn forever in hell's fire."

Brady was about to come unglued with remorse and a downright fear of losing his soul, plus what his parents would do if they found out. He could scarcely talk. "I... I did it!" he exclaimed. "I killed those chickens, just like you said I did. And... and... Mr. Calley, I'm sorry. I've been miserable ever since I did it, and since I lied about it. I'll pay... only, I don't have the money." The tears flowed.

"I'll pay for the chickens, Brady; you may do a little lawn mowing and helping in our yard this summer, God willing. In this way you'll be helping to pay for the chickens."

Brady's shoulders shook with great sobs. "It... was downright mean of me, Mr. Calley," he cried. "But when you asked me to please not go through the rose bed again something mean rose up inside of me and I told myself I'd get even with you..." His voice trailed with his sob.

"But I wasn't unkind to you, Brady; I only told you to not do that again."
"I know. I'm just downright mean. But I'm sorry, Mr. Calley. Sorry! I want you to forgive me. . . ."

"Course I forgive you, Brady. That old carnal nature made you do what you did. And after you get saved . . . really saved . . . you must go on into holiness. You'll make a wonderful Christian, Brady."

"Maybe you'd pray with me, Mr. Calley?" Brady's eyes brimmed over with tears of remorse and contrition. "Gladly, Son. Gladly. And God willing, after you get your hunting license this year, you and your father just might like to come hunting with Hoppy and me. Hoppy kind of likes you."

"You mean . . . I mean, would you really do that after what I've done?"

"Sure thing, Brady. Sure thing. Jesus took me in when I was contemptible and mean and unlovely and I'll sure take you with me, God willing. And now, let's pray."

In deep sorrow for his sins, Brady dropped on his knees in prayer beside Fred Calley. All Heaven was listening in.