An Addition to the Family

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EVENING, Fanny, how's the cattle business comin'? Gimme a Schlitz, Jim. Well, lemme see, Arlo, maybe I could get to your pickup at the end of the week. If I don't call you by Friday, you know I'm too busy. Are you celebrating somethin' or has your old lady got you in the doghouse, too? I need a better word than doghouse—it's a cuss word as far as I'm concerned.

Well, you know this big ox of a dog that rides in the back of my pickup—at least when I can get him out of the front seat? Oh, you haven't seen him. He's got hair the color of Loretta Hornung's—dark red, you know. Oh? Well, anyway, the color it used to be. Long legs, big floppy ears, a hound-dog's head that's too big for the rest of him, and you can count his ribs right through his hide. Let me tell you—I've had him three months and he's about to break up my home.

We went to a place north of Chi for Pearl's brother's graduation. You know how that is—according to the wife you gotta wear a tie and jacket no matter how blasted hot it is. It's to show respect for the occasion, she says. So anyway her brother kinda sneaks up to the old lady and asks her how we'd like to take his dog home. He's got a real sad tale about how this guy he rents from don't want the dog runnin' around anymore. And you know how women are—right away she gets this soft look in her eyes and the kids are gettin' real eager and jumpin' up and down. I mean what can ya do. I said to wait until we'd at least seen the dog but I know right then I might as well give in. So we go to the apartment and here's this ox at the top of the stairs. We get all his good points: he's got a pedigree with eleven champions in his family, he's housebroke, and so on. So I give in, it doesn't even do any good to argue that it's a long ride in a car, 'cause her kid brother right away answers that he loves to ride, and we take the dog home. He was real good for the three hun-
dred and fifty miles—he laid right down on the kids' pillow and slept most of the way home. One time I thought I'd be able to take him back right away—the kids had some ice cream and he had a cone down in one gulp. The kid was so shocked she didn't cry for about two miles. Pearl and I tried to keep our faces straight so the kid wouldn't think we didn't have sympathy for her, but it was pretty hard goin' until she started yowlin' about more ice cream.

So anyway we get home and he's real nice—lays down on a rug by our bed. Then it seems like only about fifteen minutes and I feel this hot breath sniffing around my head and hear whining. It took me a while, and I was gonna fake it, but my old lady shook me, so I figured I better get up. I figured maybe if I did it for a while she'd feel sorry for a workin' man and take over. So I get up, and go downstairs, and when I'm ready I call the damn dog. No answer. I go back up the stairs and here's the mutt sacked out on my side of the bed. My wife's got her head under the covers but I know she ain't asleep from the snortin' noise she's makin' to try to keep from laughin' out loud. So I get real heated up and tell her next time it's her turn and I can laugh at her. And she gets real bitter and asks me who woke who up to feed both kids at night. I try to be nice and remind her that I wasn't built for it. That time she didn't speak to me for a whole day.

Next thing you know—well, we got this plastic couch in the front room. Ya know, I get pretty smelly and dirty between the trucks and the chickens, so I got a plastic couch 'cause I gotta get my rest at noon. The old lady took the rug off the floor to keep the dog from gettin' hair all over it and chewin' it up. He had the linoleum to lay on—so you can figure out where he's layin' when I come home. So I pull him off, 'cause as usual she ain't got dinner ready. He stayed on the floor until I got up from the table but, I swear, as soon as he saw I was gonna lay down again, he raced for the couch. You know where I landed—on my backside on the floor. The old lady took off for the bathroom and closed the door so I couldn't hear her laughin', but I knew what she was doin' all right. So when she came out I was real polite (rememberin'
last time), and asked her if she wouldn't please try to keep
the dog off the couch, just like I politely wish that we had
some chairs to sit on when she's got the house real messy; and
she gets real hurt, and says he just turns his head away when
she tells him anything and he's so sensitive she hates to hit
him. She starts to complain about him not stayin' in the yard
unless she sits right there, and I make some remark about
her not needin' to have so much coffee or hear so much dirt.
That time it was nearly a week before she quit bein' bitter.

Another beer, Jim. I figured he'd be a pretty good
watchdog and he is. He'd raise the roof about six-thirty on
Sunday morning when the paper boy came, and about six on
Tuesday morning when Gary came with the milk, and any
other time someone came to the door. It makes you sleep a
little better to know you have a dog in the house. But I
could come home anytime, you know my hours, and step
over him, and he wouldn't even bother to raise his head. So
anyway, beginning last week, when my wife was still hot
under the collar, he won't even let me in the door without
her comin' and tellin' him it's all right. I made a joke about
it and said it looked almost like she was trainin' him and she
said she guessed the dog didn't think it was necessary to come
home at all hours of the night either.

So I was tryin' to patch things up so I could at least eat
meals without havin' her glarin' at me, and asked her if she'd
like to go to Illinois with me to pick up chickens. You know
what she said? She couldn't leave the dog that long. It was
all right to leave the kids alone with Mom for that long but
she couldn't leave the dumb mutt for that long. Which is
just what I said to her. Which is why I'm here instead of
home. She gave me that look and I decided I'd better let her
cool off before she had that dog on me.

Well, I don't know, Fanny. It would be nice to give the
dog a place where he could run like he wanted to and the
house would be a darn sight more peaceful. But you know
how the kids are. I'd have to do an awful lot of talkin' before
I could make 'em see he'd be better off. I guess life would
be pretty dull if the old lady and I didn't have somethin' to
fight about.