The Grønfeldt family had bought a dog. Actually, it was Mrs. Grønfeldt who had bought him. Mr. Grønfeldt didn’t like dogs, but he had the privilege of paying for the beast. He cost a tidy sum, for he was a noble dog with genealogical table and tree. His official name was Rudolf von Aspenäs of By, but Mrs. Grønfeldt called him “darling,” “my little angel,” and quite a few other nice attributes. The neighbors called him a mongrel and a bastard; Mr. Grønfeldt just “you hell of a dog.”

Of all these pretty names he obeyed none. Rudolf, as we shall take the liberty of plainly calling him, resembled a bottle brush. And those parts of him which didn’t look like a bottle brush didn’t look like a dog anyway. As regards his character, there wasn’t much to brag about. In spite of his distinguished ancestors and blue blood he was a real tyke in his way of going about things, and he hadn’t the faintest idea of proper dog manners. He “went out for a walk” on the parquet floor of the drawing room. He was possessed of an inextinguishable love for dunghills and garbage heaps; he would wallow in them and later pick out some comfortable armchair where he would doze off. In this way he provided the Grønfeldt home with some fine outdoor odors.

After a fortnight or so in the bosom of the family, he had consumed an incredible amount of divers items not usually considered part of a dog’s diet, scratched holes in the brocade of the upholstered furniture, gnawed some mahogany chairs asunder, and done a few other things in the same line.

A well-developed inclination for anger, coupled with a magnificent lust for murder, was a pronounced feature in Rudolf. He specialized in cats, whose necks he crushed before they had time to blink their eyes. When the town had been entirely cleansed of them, he took to postmen and messengers, whom, however, he was content just to taste in passing. He would even chew parts of Mr. Grønfeldt.

Mr. Grønfeldt hated the hound passionately. He would have given much to get rid of him, but as he was not master of his own house he dared not lay hands on the creature. However strange it may seem, Mrs. Grønfeldt worshiped the dog, so Mr. Grønfeldt had to put up with things and suffer in silence.

Rudolf proved an expensive pet. Mr. Grønfeldt soon found himself obliged to pay the majority of doctor’s and tailor’s bills in town. The office messengers had
found in Rudolf a good, cheap method of getting new clothes: it required only energy and a little courage.

Once Mr. Grönfeldt nearly succeeded in getting rid of the monster. One day when he came home from office the parish constable was waiting for him. He was, curiously enough, waiting on the roof of the house. Beneath him, the “darling” patrolled on stiff legs, snarling. “Take away your damned dog,” spat the constable, crimson with anger, “or I’ll shoot!” Mr. Grönfeldt quickly sought protection behind the nearest tree, for he had no desire to be shot. “Take away the dog, or I’ll shoot him!” repeated the constable. Mr. Grönfeldt drew a sigh of relief when he heard that the threat was aimed at the dog. “Please do,” he said mildly and crawled out from his hiding place. The constable waited no longer but took aim and fired. There was a bang and, although the dog was not hit, Mr. Grönfeldt was. He got the bullet through his foot. As for the dog, he rushed up with his hair bristling, for he was an intelligent animal.

After this unfortunate accident Mr. Grönfeldt was forced to spend quite some time in hospital. The parish constable had to stand the expenses, and that, of course, was a little balm on the wound.

Some time after Mr. Grönfeldt had recovered, a great event was to take place in the town. A world-famous artist, who was visiting the country, had notified the municipality of his intention of honoring the place with a concert. It was indeed an occurrence of major proportions. For days beforehand arrangements were made to welcome the famous man in a worthy manner. At public expense, the houses on those streets down which he was to pass were freshly painted; gates of honor were erected; and flags, flowers, and garlands adorned streets and squares.

People by the thousands thronged the town to hear the famous artist. Special trains were run, for the stream of travelers was enormous.

When the time set for the opening of the concert approached, the hall was packed to the last seat with an expectant, festively dressed audience. When the divine personage appeared on the stage, a roaring wave of applause rose toward him which would not be calmed down. Dark, tall, and impressive, he stood there bowing—the man who had brought a whole world to its knees. When the applause finally died away it was replaced with a few minutes of utter silence. Then he raised his violin to his shoulder, and a cascade of notes filled the air.

The bewitched audience held its breath in ecstasy. There was something intangible, something supernatural in his playing. But suddenly a strangely discordant, jarring note mingled with the melody. It was a moaning that rose and fell, ending at last in a long-drawn-out, abysmal howl. Then it stopped as suddenly as it had started—only to start again in another key. Mr. Grönfeldt began to perspire. There was something ominous, foreboding, something all too familiar in the sound. He had heard it too often not to be able to recognize it. There could be no doubt that it was the unspeakable Rudolf sitting somewhere in the hall competing with the violinist. It was not only Mr. Grönfeldt who recognized the sound. Everywhere in the hall people whispered: “That’s Grönfeldt’s beast of a dog!” Night after night they had been forced to listen to the same diabolical concert.

The violinist had not immediately heard his competitor’s efforts, but when the latter struck up an étude in a minor
key with a scream that sounded like a siren, he couldn't help hearing it. His playing first grew a little vague and then stopped completely. Grönfeldt's dog, on the contrary, did not stop but carried on with the étude to the bitter end. Great commotion... explanations... apologies... and then a feverish search for the dog. It could not be found anywhere. It must have sneaked out of the hall. The concert could continue.

The violinist seemed somewhat agitated and nervous but began to play. Everything went fine for a while, but then the trouble started again only with the difference that this time it was twice as bad. The artist stopped his performance for the second time, and now he was seriously angry. They all did their best to soothe him and get hold of the dog. They succeeded more or less in the former but failed completely in the latter: the dog was as if swallowed up by the earth.

For the third time the interrupted concert was resumed while the audience sat on tenterhooks. There it was again! This time the virtuoso flung his fiddle away and rushed out. Mr. Grönfeldt also rushed out: he was afraid of being lynched. Thus ended the concert. Rudolf got the last word—or rather note. (He was found later, by the way, sleeping on a drum under the stage floor.)

Mrs. Grönfeldt had been out of town for a few days, a circumstance which permitted Mr. Grönfeldt to lead a freer life. He spent his evenings in jolly company in the various pubs of the town. On the last night of freedom he staggered home somewhat overmuch refreshed. After undressing he turned to his bed, only to find it occupied: Rudolf lay there snoring. Mr. Grönfeldt swore, for he knew there was going to be trouble. To disturb the brute when it pleased him to sleep was exceedingly dangerous. If it hadn't been for the fact that Mr. Grönfeldt had a considerable quantity of alcohol in him, he would most certainly have refrained from any attempts at conquering the bed. Now, however, he felt courageous and, what was more, he was furious. "Get up, you infernal beast!" he shouted. "Get out of my bed, or I'll teach you a lesson!"

The dog, unaccustomed to such rough language, looked at him in astonishment. Then he snarled threateningly. Mr. Grönfeldt's courage fell a few degrees, and he looked round for some weapon. His eye was caught by the tongs in front of the fireplace and, armed with these, he made an attack. The bedside lamp suffered from the first blow; the second maneuver hit the chamber pot. It never came to a real battle, however, as Rudolf had slipped under the bed, whence he made a well-aimed attack on his enemy. Mr. Grönfeldt found himself forced to retreat hastily, and at the last minute he found refuge on a table. Rudolf, the wretch, returned to the bed, where he lay down and resumed his interrupted sleep.

Mr. Grönfeldt now decided to employ another method. "Don't be naughty, daddy's own doggie, that's daddy's bed," he coaxed. Useless: whichever way he tried, it was as if he spoke to the wall. He began again: "Little darling, come to daddy, and you shall have a little—a little—brandy." (That was the only thing he could think of in such a hurry.) Rudolf did not seem interested in brandy, or in Mr. Grönfeldt either, for he went right on sleeping. This was too much for Mr. Grönfeldt, and he completely lost his temper. Mad with rage he flung his shoe at the dog. Crash!—the big mirror had cracked. The dog barked. The neighbors upstairs stamped on the floor in a frenzy.

Mr. Grönfeldt, however, did not yet consider the game lost. Where the lion skin does not suffice one must resort to the fox skin, he thought, and decided to capture the bed by cunning. He had a brilliant idea. If he rang the doorbell the bastard would surely rush out to see who it was. Then the thing was to be quick about it and hurry in and bang the door while the dog was still outside.

Everything went according to Mr. Grönfeldt's calculations up till the moment when he was to hurry in. For some
inexplicable reason, he happened in his nervousness to push the door in a little too violently with the result that it sprang back and clicked in its lock, leaving him outside. Rudolf however, succeeded in slipping in at the last second. During the succeeding minutes Mr. Grönfeldt's language was quite unprintable. Then he dived into the raspberry bushes in the garden because some girls from the telephone company, walking home after their night's duty, passed his house. Not unnaturally, he disliked the idea of appearing before them in his scanty attire.

The hours which now followed were never forgotten by Mr. Grönfeldt. The dawn had grown so old that the factories started work. There was a constant stream of people on the road leading past Mr. Grönfeldt's villa. As if that were not enough, his only hiding place consisted in these same raspberry bushes, and it was around and between them that Mr. Grönfeldt rotated. He had to drop his plan of dashing up to the villa and smashing a window to gain an entrance into the house because there was always somebody walking by on the road. In the end, however, he was forced to do it, for, after all, he couldn't very well crawl about in the bushes for ever.

A little while later the Grönfeldt home was surrounded by the town's police corps, which had been ordered to the place to catch a burglar who had forced his way into the house. Naturally enough, no thief was found, and the case was cleared up. That the episode came to figure in the local press was not Mr. Grönfeldt's idea, of course.

ONE day Mr. Grönfeldt went out for a walk to air the monster. When Mr. Grönfeldt came walking with Rudolf past the station warehouse he espied a dog which exactly resembled his own. Alike as two peas, he thought. It was tied to a post and had a label attached to its collar proving that it was going to be sent to some other place.

Then the devil got into Mr. Grönfeldt. Why not change the dogs? he thought. Nothing could be worse than Rudolf. He looked around and, nobody being in sight, quickly transformed his idea into action. Scarcely had he committed his crime than his conscience haunted him. What if it were found out? What would his wife say when she knew that her darling pet had disappeared into the unknown depths of fate? And the police? What if they threw him into prison? The cold sweat of fear ran down Mr. Grönfeldt's body. He was terribly afraid. If he had had the chance, he would have changed back his Rudolf, but now it was too late. A railway porter was already dragging him away.

Gradually he calmed down. When he came to think of it, it was absolutely impossible to tell the difference between the two creatures. He was willing to swear that the dog he now had was Rudolf. And the longer he looked at him the more convinced he became that his little trick would never be detected.

* * *

Some days later the Grönfeldt family went abroad. The dog was left in the care of a neighbor who promised to look after him and not let him stray.

The Grönfeldts were away for some months. When they came back they were greeted by the astonishing news that their dog Rudolf had given birth to seven puppies.