

# *Rascal*

Sterling North



## I: *May*

---

IT was in May, 1918, that a new friend and companion came into my life: a character, a personality, and a ring-tailed wonder. He weighed less than one pound when I discovered him, a furry ball of utter dependence and awakening curiosity, unweaned and defenseless. Wowser and I were immediately protective. We would have fought any boy or dog in town who sought to harm him.

Wowser was an exceptionally intelligent and responsible watchdog, guarding our house and lawns and gardens and all my pets. But because of his vast size—one hundred and seventy pounds of muscled grace and elegance—he seldom had to resort to violence. He could shake any dog on the block as a terrier shakes a rat. Wowser never started a fight, but after being challenged, badgered, and insulted, he eventually would turn his worried face and great sad eyes upon his tormentor, and



more in sorrow than in anger, grab the intruder by the scruff of the neck, and toss him into the gutter.

Wowser was an affectionate, perpetually hungry Saint Bernard. Like most dogs of his breed he drooled a little. In the house he had to lie with his muzzle on a bath towel, his eyes downcast as though in slight disgrace. Pat Delaney, a saloonkeeper who lived a couple of blocks up the street, said that Saint Bernards drool for the best of all possible reasons. He explained that in the Alps these noble dogs set forth every winter day, with little kegs of brandy strapped beneath their chins, to rescue wayfarers lost in the snowdrifts. Generations of carrying the brandy, of which they have never tasted so much as a blessed drop, have made them so thirsty that they continuously drool. The trait had now become hereditary, Pat said, and whole litters of bright and thirsty little Saint Bernards are born drooling for brandy.

On this pleasant afternoon in May, Wowser and I started up First Street toward Crescent Drive where a semicircle of late Victorian houses enjoyed a hilltop view. Northward lay miles of meadows, groves of trees, a winding stream, and the best duck and muskrat marsh in Rock County. As we turned down a country lane past Bardeen's orchard and vineyard, the signature of spring was everywhere: violets and anemones in the grass; the apple trees in promising bud along the bough.

Ahead lay some of the most productive walnut and hickory trees I had ever looted, a good swimming hole in the creek, and, in one bit of forest, a real curiosity—a phosphorescent stump which gleamed at night with fox-



fire, as luminescent as all the lightning bugs in the world—ghostly and terrifying to boys who saw it for the first time. It scared me witless as I came home one evening from fishing. So I made it a point to bring my friends that way on other evenings, not wishing to be selfish about my pleasures.

Oscar Sunderland saw me as I passed his bleak farmhouse far down that lane. He was a friend of mine who knew enough not to talk when we went fishing. And we were trapping partners on the marsh. His mother was a gentle Norwegian woman who spoke English with no trace of an accent, and also her native language. His father Herman Sunderland was another kettle of hasenpfeffer—German on his mother's side and Swedish on his father's—with a temper and dialect all his own.

Oscar's mother baked delicious Norwegian pastries, particularly around Christmastime. Sometimes in placing before me a plate of her delicacies she would say something tender to me in Norwegian. I always turned away to hide the shameful moisture in my eyes. As Mrs. Sunderland knew, my mother had died when I was seven, and I think that was why she was especially kind to me.

Oscar's tough old father presented no such problem. I doubt that he had ever said anything kind to anyone in his life. Oscar was very much afraid of him and risked a whipping if he were not at home in time to help with the milking.

No one was concerned about the hours *I* kept. I was a very competent eleven-year-old. If I came home long after dark, my father would merely look up from his



# Welcome to the North home!

Sunks, woodchucks, a crow named Poe, an 18-foot, half-finished canoe in the living room...nothing's surprising at the North residence. Not even Sterling's new pet raccoon. It isn't long after Sterling adds Rascal to the menagerie that the two are best friends, doing everything together, partners for a perfect year of adventure—until the spring day when everything suddenly changes.

“Everyone should knock off work, sit beneath the nearest tree, and enjoy *Rascal* from cover to cover.”

—*Chicago Tribune*

A NEWBERY HONOR BOOK



PUFFIN

0-14-034445-4



3 4 4 4 5 >



UPC



U.S.A. \$5.99 / CAN. \$8.99

Ages 8 up

VISIT US AT [www.penguin.com/youngreaders](http://www.penguin.com/youngreaders)

Cover photograph copyright  
© Corbis/Punchstock

Cover design by Kristina Duewell