

Candy's Companion

by James O'Mahony

Candy limped out of the dark and dreary room and stepped outside. The glaring sun blinded him immediately, and he instinctively covered his face with his one arm. He felt the sweltering heat engulf him and he removed his hat and began gently fanning himself in a futile attempt to cool himself down. Candy recognised that it wasn't working, and with a heavy sigh, he placed his hat back on his head, readjusting it to block out the light from blinding him again. He turned around and stood just in the doorway of the bunkhouse. He reflected on his cleaning of the previously filthy room. He repeated the specific instructions his bunkmates had given him in his head, like it was a motivational mantra. Although it was nothing impressive, he took massive satisfaction in his work. Although others thought of it as simply cleaning, it was one of the few things that gave him any joy.

After sitting and resting his sore foot for a short while, he noticed the absence of his dog. He felt a sense of loneliness and worry. He enjoyed the dog's company, as he was the only one that couldn't order him around. He immediately sat up and hurried out the door in search of his missing companion.

He began to become increasingly worried about the wellbeing of his dog, who was just as fragile as he was. He eventually saw the poor mutt lying down beside a tree in an attempt to escape to shade. He whistled for it to follow. In his usual fashion, Candy had to pick up the dog before it was ready to walk. He struggled to pick it up with only the use of one hand, but practice meant he could do it pretty well. Though it would not have been clear to a passer-by, the frail old man was thrilled to find the dog safe and sound. Although he had tried to ignore the possibility, he had been worried that he might have discovered the dog lying there lifeless. The dog was his only friend, and he knew he couldn't live without it. He lay the dog down and they began the journey back.

Night had fallen faster than Candy expected and he was ready to go to bed. As he walked back, he thought about the new guys on the ranch. He pondered the possibility that they were up to something.

They travelled in two, which was unusual, and only one of them did any talking. He considered a lot of possibilities, each getting progressively more ridiculous. He continued this train of thought all the way back to the bunkhouse. He saw the two new guys along with Slim and Carlson. He didn't pay them much attention until he heard Carlson addressing him. He realised what they were discussing, and his heart dropped as he looked at his dog for one last time...