

A DOG'S LIFE

TOLD TO IT

MARGOT—before you divide your affection between your master and those fine little pups that will be, I want to give you a sketch of your life, of our life together. For you understand your friends in proportion as they are fond of you and you are fond of them.

(Gently, please! Down! You are as tall as myself when you stand upright, and nearly as heavy, and of all dogs you Great Danes are the most cat-like in your movements; but I do not want your height and weight and activity used against me. So down, then! Down!)

Your life has been an almost unbroken web. Could the strands of human existence be so accurately traced. . . . Ben Johnson's words apply to you :

In small proportions we just beauties see ;
And in small measure life may perfect be.

You have a well-grown shrub of life where your master and his fellow men have trees with torn off branches.

You date (for me) from a couple of years before you came here ; a year and five months before you were even born. There was a dog show in Devonshire with a brindle Great Dane, like you, in it—not a prize winner, only a V.H.C. Being very lonely, I watched with envious eyes how it jumped upon its keeper, placed its forepaws on his shoulder, fondled him, licked his face, and whimpered with delight. And I thought to myself, “Some day I will have a dog like that.”

Heaven knows what happened between then and the day you were exchanged for gold ! I dare not call the whole of it to mind. For one thing, I loved an invalid pointer called Bloom. Months I was occupied in nursing her back to health, coaxing her to eat ; and then they carted her away in a big box. I’ve seen her since—in that huge glass barn at Sydenham — deafened with yapping and hemmed in by people who talked of show condition and patent nostrums, sales and

values and judges' mistakes, points and prizes and champions. I called her in the old way, "Bloom, beauty!" But she had forgotten. She did not know me. I was become to her only a desirable acquaintance, someone she would have taken to. Ashamed to let the kennelman see tears in my eyes, I turned away. She might have recollected if I had stayed long enough. More than you I loved her, Margot; she was my only stay in great trouble; but we were not together long.

You grew in your master's mind before you started growing. A day came when he bought the *Exchange and Mart*; studied points, breeders, strains and pedigrees; and took the train for London. He wanted a Great Dane, like the one at the show—dog or bitch—brindle preferably—well-bred but not necessarily a prize winner—not unusually tall, but upstanding and limber—strong enough to tramp the country—affectionate and kindly with children. You are all that. Two guineas was to have been the price of you.

At several markets and menageries they told me they had no Great Dane in stock, but could get one to order. But how could one *order* a dog, like a book or a suit of clothes? There might be implied obligations to purchase a brute. So I tramped on through parts of London I had never seen, and never shall see again, probably. At last I came across a real Great Dane—your father, Margot—in a snuffy little back shop somewhere just north of Whitechapel. Had they Great Danes for sale? They produced two small steely-blue puddings of pups.

“No?” they asked when I refused the pups. “Too young? You want one old enough to walk twenty miles a day?”

They took me through a dismal North London square, where empty tins and pickle pots grew instead of grass on the central plot, through a dingy house where a woman held a baby to her bare breast with one hand and washed dirty clothes with the other; and we entered a high iron cage where eight huge dogs, barking and growling, made one feel like Daniel in the lion's den.

“No?” they asked again. “You think these are too old? Too expensive, you say? D’you really mean to train a Dane puppy yourself?”

They opened a ramshackle little wooden kennel. A three-quarter grown pup rushed out, sniffed at me, sprang on me, and had my best clothes dirted all over in a trice. It was you, Margot, your own self! They tried to drag out your shy litter sister, but there was no need. You were mine—mine from that moment. I didn’t choose you; you chose me.

But you were too expensive.

Next day I was back again in your kennel, and could have sworn you recognised me, so thickly did you plaster my clothes with mud. “But it’s too much money,” said I.

“You can’t have a pedigree Dane for less,” returned the breeder. “Her father, Lord Copenhagen, won two hundred prizes.”

“That’s very nice, of course . . .”

“She’s got the best blood in England in her.”

“And about food?”

“Look, she’s not delicate!” You were thrown a green-mouldy crust, Margot, which you gobbled up at once.

“I see she’s not. But what’s that lump on her haunch?”

“Oh, there? That’s only a kennel bruise. A little warm water bathing——”

“I’ll give pounds instead of guineas.”

“Can’t do it. Her food has cost me that.” (Green-mouldy crusts, Margot!) “Look at her pedigree—sire, Lord Copenhagen—dam, Tricksey Jane!”

“Very well, have it guineas, then.”

It’s my opinion you saw into my mind, Margot, and were begging me to take you away. I would have risen to ten guineas.

You were delivered with a collar at Paddington station. Do you remember that we took a second-class ticket because porters and such like are kindlier to second-class passengers; how the inspector said you might travel in the carriage if those already there had no objection; how I poked my head in at the window, asking, “Do you object to a puppy here?”—how they said,

“ We love dogs ! ” and how, when the door was opened, you, Margot, three-quarters of a yard high, young and frolicsome, jumped in upon them ? They did love dogs. You made them dirty, and nevertheless they praised you. Your master was like a woman with a naughty, pretty child. They asked your name.

“ I have no name ;
I am but seven months old.”
What shall I call thee ?

There was once, Margot, an artist's model, a *petite* delicate pale Alsacienne, who used to frequent a certain café in the Latin Quarter. She knew how to dress her own particular type of beauty, so that we called her the Pre-Raphaelite Girl, and other pretty names. She used to make your master treat her to glasses of light French beer (“ Un bock pour moi, mon cher ! ”) and cigarettes. She wanted to go on the stage, the real stage. She did sometimes perform in *cafés chantants*. One evening she sang a whole part from *Carmen* into my left ear. “ Belle, mon cher, n'est-ce pas ? ” she said.

“ Tu es belle ? ”

“ Non ! Ma voix, cochon ! ”

I had heard it very well, although the piano and fiddles were playing Wagner, billiard balls were clicking, white-aproned waiters were shouting, and a couple of hundred voices were going twenty to the dozen. It was the last I saw of her, her costume à l'art nouveau. Perhaps she was not highly respectable. I don't know. I never did. She is a *fleur du mal*, crystallised in my memory, and still a little flagrant. Her name was Margot. And so is yours.

Neither of you was made to run in traces. When you arrived, Margot, the first thing you did, after knocking down a child or two, was to bite your new leather lead into five moist chawed-up pieces.

Lucky that our landlady was at the seaside when you came home! You tore up one mat, demolished a slipper, bit my new sea-going rug into holes (that was put down to keep you off the cold stones between the kitchen and the scullery doors), and you took a flying leap upon the break-

fast table. Strange to say, you only smashed a plate, a jug, the jam-jar and the lid of the best tea-pot. Your master feared he wouldn't be able to keep you; but he did, although you sent him to bed every night trembling with fatigue, and then had him out of it again to stop your howling.

'Tis to be hoped you do not remember the so-called kennel bruise, which grew into a cyst; and the operation on it. At the first attempt you slipped off the tape twitch, put on to keep your jaws close; you heaved up the four of us who were holding you down; you bit wildly at your master for the first and last time, when he had you by the scruff of your neck whilst the veterinary surgeon's men stood around, prepared to scatter in case you ran amuck. You returned to the surgery in an iron muzzle two sizes too small for you, and the cyst. . . Never mind. The lance went in with a jerk. Yet afterwards, without twitch or muzzle, you used to lie on the ground, stretched out and groaning, while I probed your wound with tincture on the stump of a

feather. Other diseases you have had—eczema, canker, parasites outside and in, and a touch of bronchitis—but we have cured them all. I think you like a pill; castor oil is certainly to your taste. You would hardly win a championship or a big prize. You are not quite tall enough (though children often take you for a lion broken loose); you have too much loose skin about your neck, which makes you look like a lady in a fluffy dressing-gown; and your head is too snipey; but you are fatter, glossier, in better muscular condition, more pleasing to the eye, than half the flabby, splay-footed, kennel-kept prize-winners at shows. And your face is partly human. A poet says :—

There is no laughter in the natural world
Of beast or fish or bird, though no sad doubt
Of their futurity to them unfurled
Has dared to check the mirth-compelling shout.
. . . Who had dared foretell
That only man, by some sad mockery
Should learn to laugh who learns that he must die.

But I've seen you laugh, Margot. I recol-

lect your face when that whippet ran squeaking away from your ponderous civilities; when the silly young woman screamed, "I can't abear dogs!"—when, on those lovely mornings, the sun lit up Salisbury Plain and we rushed out of the house together. I know just where the wrinkles come when you laugh. A fig for the poet's philosophising! Smile again.

We went a walking tour through the good West Country. It was then that we learnt the jog-trot of our life together. Everywhere they said, "Shouldn't like to meet he in the dead o' night, Mister." In stableyards they stood round watching while I washed your feet and groomed you with a borrowed dandy-brush. "Jest like a bloomin' hoss," they said. You opened the conversation at the inns where your master had his bread and cheese and beer, and you your pint of milk. Because you looked ferocious, they fed and patted you the more when they found you gentle. A man at Falkland wanted to thread worsted through the flaps of your ears, which was, he de-

clared, an infallible cure for canker. I wonder what *you* would have been doing the while. At Wells they put you on a bed of damp peat-moss in a mouldy tower, and in revenge you kept half the little town awake by howling all night like two wild beast shows encamped together. They were glad to be rid of us there! And next day you were so tired for want of sleep that you ran into every open cottage door and sat down among the frightened inhabitants, as if you had expected an oriental hospitality. Without a cry you were hauled up by your tail as you were slipping down into the crypt of Glastonbury Abbey—without a yap, O game and well-bred Margot! At Knowle you were dog-tired, and because the landlady said with many sniffs that she couldn't have dogs in *her* house, we mounted a load of empty soda-water bottles, so proceeding into Bridgwater, to a hotel recommended by the carter because the proprietors kept dogs—*dogs* being at that time an enormously fat pug that supped nightly on chocolate creams. While I was having a

bath you escaped from the hotel skittle-alley into Bridgwater town, to find me. Half-clothed, a delight to the small boys of the place, helter-skelter, I was after you. "Have you seen a large brindle boarhound this way?" I asked people. After they had put me on the tracks of an old red setter, a yellow Airedale terrier and a black retriever, we found one another in the market place, and for joy you almost knocked me down.

The flies on the Quantocks, where you made your ears bleed with shaking them; inhospitable Crowcombe, where the rooks cawed so solemnly in the twilight, and you begged a cottager to take us in; our weary tramp on to Stogumber; the kind butcher at Minehead who boiled a whole sheep's head for you; peaceful moonlit Brendon in Exmoor, and the small boy who loved you at sight; the thrashing you had for eating garbage in the Lynn valley; that thundery afternoon on the North Devon moors when the air was full of flying ants and we were both dead-beat; the two wasps that stung

you in the coffee-room at Clovelly so that you dashed wildly over the crockery and cold joints ; the spry, profane little maid near Hartland who called your master a "beastly devil" because he gave you the strap for stealing a pound of fresh butter ; the games you had with the little maid, head-over-heels, somersault, roly-polly, batter pat, jump, flop ! Do you remember, Margot ? You have loved little children ever since. How many of them have you kissed off their feet ? Not every mother says (like the one in Sheep Street) when you peep into her perambulator, or tip over her child : "Lard, look 'ee, Missis, if 'er en't a-been an' kissed 'en !"

We made a pilgrimage to Morwenstow, to Parson Hawker's church. In pious memory of the good old poet who used to take his cats into the chancel, I took you with me, too ; and you showed your piety by trying to jump the altar rails.

Keeping you is not all meaty bones. Sometimes it is mere dry dog biscuit. Accidentally you knocked your master down and

sprained his arm ; which led to one illness after another, ending up with a week's bad temper and the worst thrashing you ever had. A House that Margot Built, that fell about her faithful hide! Would that one never had to beat you. Yet I think you prefer hot anger to cold justice. Uncalculating love, a fit of muddy fury boiling up from the atavistic depths of one, a struggle, curses, and quick repentance. . . . You understand such people ; you have a fellow-feeling with them, and love them better than those cool, prudent, proper, respectable citizens, swaddled in civilisation, who seldom act without good reason and never repent nor abase themselves. You dogs keep one in touch with one's own primeval nature. You are the companions of joy and sorrow, not of a stagnant temperateness in all things. But I do wish you would not cry out under the strap. It stirs too much the brute in one. You, when you love us, may not comprehend our language fully, but you feel our feelings, communicated in some wordless way, like music among ourselves,

or telepathically. Let those who wish write books on comparative psychology ; whether animals reason or not ; whether their actions are the result of instinct, of inherited compound reflex action, or of intelligence. There are bonds between us beyond reasoning. No man learns much of men except he love them. So if they love you, they will learn, and

The rest may reason and welcome ; 'tis we dog-lovers know.

When you become old ; when you chew your last bone, prod my cheek for the last time with your cool nose, and wag the final wag of that heavy bruising tail . . . Don't let us think about it. Such ideas may be gross sentimentality, but the event will be very, very real.

I saw a dead dog's finer part
Shining within each faithful heart
Of those bereft. Then said I : " This must be
Its immortality."

Yes, and more. You don't know Byron's *Vision of Judgment*, where King George

slips into heaven whilst Satan and the Archangel are wrangling for possession of his soul. But I fancy that when the recording Angel presents his piebald account of me, he will say: that I loved dogs and cats and all animals, and they loved me; and I shouldn't wonder if I don't get in; and at the Celestial Gate to welcome me, there will be you, Margot, and Bloom and Peter, and with you, in waiting, Teager, alias Gyp, and Charlie and Doctor and Nell and Ginger and Jumbo and Jack and Jill and Nip, and perhaps Toby; and Tabby and Whitey and Tibbie and Jim and Ma and Pa and Baby, and that other Baby who was nineteen when I was, but never twenty; and Jacob and Wild Cat and Tinker and Minnie and Manxie and Fluff and Bully and Fuzz, and ferrets and rabbits and birds—a Noah's Ark of them—all at the Celestial Gate to welcome me, because in varying degrees I loved them and they loved me. You, Margot, you shall pilot me in. For I am to you your Almighty and your slave . . .

It's only a fantastical vision, I know ; yet the seer wrote : "*Everything possible to be believed is an image of truth.*"

STEPHEN REYNOLDS

P.S.—Margot ate the pups.