

# Canine Caprice

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"These Never Were Traitors" was the title of the huge composite picture — an artist's attempt to convey his idea of the noble dog. Evidently he knew well the story of the faithful dog mourning in watchful vigil at the grave of his dead master, for he pictured him there amid the eternal green of life and the stone-gray of death. He knew well the knightly heroism of the German shepherd bearing his sign — the Red Cross — among the bloody battlelines of Flanders Field. Perhaps he had seen a child tugged by its clothing from the path of a moving train or had observed the blind man walking briskly with self-assurance, led by his Seeing Eye. His purpose was clear — unlike men and women, "these never were traitors."

Seldom have human friendships been heralded, or even pictured, as have the relationship between man and dog. At one time it was the duty of former Senator George Vest of Missouri to prosecute a man who had killed the dog of his client. In his address to the jury he delivered the following tribute:

The one absolutely unselfish friend that a man can have in this selfish world, the one that never deserts him, the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous, is his dog. A man's dog stands by him in prosperity and in poverty, in health and in sickness. He will sleep on the cold ground, where the wintry winds blow and the snow drives fiercely, if only he may be near his master's side. He will kiss the hand that has no food to offer; he will lick the wounds and sores that come in contact with the roughness of the world. He guards the sleep of his pauper master as if he were a prince. When all other friends desert, he remains. When riches take wings and reputation falls to pieces, he is as constant in his love as the sun in its journey through the heavens. If fortune drives the master forth, an outcast in

the world, friendless and homeless, the faithful dog asks no higher privilege than that of accompanying him, to guard against danger, to fight against his enemies. And when the last scene of all comes, and death takes the master in its embrace, and his body is laid away in the cold ground, no matter if all other friends pursue their way, there by his graveside will the noble dog be found, his head between his paws, his eyes sad but open in alert watchfulness, faithful and true even to death.<sup>1</sup>

I, too, have known noble dogs, although my experiences have not been so dramatic. I have watched the once-exuberant body of my cousin's dog grow listless and gray as he grieves for his master who has been overseas for nearly two years. My own family once owned a brilliant-minded German shepherd who died of grief when his mistress went on a month's vacation and could not take him along. A human being has that faculty of mind which tells him he can forget grief — that he must forget it and live on; a dog has not. To him the loss of a loved one means the end.

In order that the reader may not suppose that I am primarily a sentimentalist, I shall dwell at length on the pleasure and humor derived from a life of experience with dogs. I can picture clearly and call by name at least twenty of the dogs my family has owned. Of these, all came to us by mutual adoption but one — an expensive, pedigreed animal, who escaped out the coal-shute the first night we had him. We learned a valuable lesson, for ever since we have had only "mutts" — lovable ones with hearts and souls.

1. M. V. O'Shea, *World Book*, W. F. Quarrie and Co., Chicago, 1928, page 1987.



Fawnie could almost talk. This little brown fox-terrier with the vibrant energy of an electron was so named because he resembled a baby deer much more than he did a dog. His doctrine was "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of rabbits." He and his girl-friend, a huge chow, would roam the woods together, splitting their catches. The tail-end usually found its way to our doorstep.

Fawnie had three weaknesses: his lack of will-power in the presence of a soft bed, his hatred of mail carriers, and his utter aversion to the feline members of the household. Cats, he felt, were absolutely unnecessary to the world, and his pride would not allow him even to touch anything that smelled of one. His unique talent for getting into scrapes has never been surpassed by even a brass monkey. His scientific name, *canis familiaris*, fitted him well, for he made friends with everyone, including the city dog-catcher. When my father went down to bail him out of "jail," there he sat, aloof from his prison-mates, head high, one ear up and one ear down, apparently indifferent to the small talk going on all around him.

As I have previously mentioned, Fawnie intensely disliked mail-carriers, because of their black bags, I suppose. He lost his temper one day when Mr. Brown refused to stop at his command, and bit his leg. The United States Government threatened to sue us for \$10,000, and warned us that if the same incident occurred again, Fawnie would be shot on sight. So began the long years of locking the little criminal up every day, until three o'clock in the afternoon, a sort of "dog parole," I suppose.

In spite of his faults — or maybe because of them — Fawnie was a perfect gentleman. He practiced chivalry as valiantly as any Ivanhoe. He learned early

that ladies come first. Always he dropped a dog-biscuit at his sister Feline's feet before indulging himself. Though only twelve inches high, he dashed out to meet his foe, no matter what its size or power; cowardice he knew not. Many times he sent a huge bulldog limping away, yelping because of the beating Fawnie had given him — all for the love of his beautiful Rusty. Could any knight have been more valiant?

Fawnie, like many people, refused to allow himself to believe he was getting old; the last years of his life were as vigorous as his puppyhood. The only time I ever saw his usually vibrating body quiet was on that fateful day in August when he refused to get up when we called him—and we knew he was dead. Now he lies in my garden under the violets. His soul is in Dog Heaven, as I feel sure there is such a place. There must be, for Colonel, Wags, Teddy, and Skippy are all there.

The little pitchers who lurk in our cupboard and supposedly possess big ears, might tell you of the numerous dialogues in which my father has firmly informed me that one dog is enough for any family (the Republican party says so — the Republicans should know). I disagree with him heartily and, being a nonconformist, assert that I do not think a thousand would be too many. However, since neither of us is a bit "dogmatic," we compromise — at the present time we have six. Each has his own particular, perhaps peculiar, personality.

Cupid is like Jane Eyre — plain and conservative — yet beautiful. Our home is her Thornfield Hall; I am her eccentric, headstrong Mr. Rochester. She roams the house in her gentle, unobtrusive manner, craving only kindness, and beaming when shown the least affection. Alas, she is but a prosaic old maid for she is much too shy to attract suitors. Thinking, however, that



perhaps she had a motherly instinct in her, we gave her two of the puppies. After she had overcome her fear of the tiny, crawling, squeaking doglets, she grew to love them as her own. Attempting to show her affection, she lifted a gigantic paw into the air and let it fall heavily on the tiny little head — a well-meant though somewhat ungentle caress.

Cupid is very sensitive — perhaps too much so. The least remark will cause tears to come to her eyes, and, as a martyr, under the bed she crawls; only the most tactful persuasion will bring her out again and then she must be hugged and kissed to convince her that she's not the worst of sinners. Though she cannot read, Cupid knows Emily Post almost as well as I. As a perfect lady, she eats not a morsel of food until it is offered to her. She seldom barks; only when she wants in the house does she sound her soft, soprano "Woof!" She keeps herself immaculate — even her fingernails are scrupulously clean. Unlike most modern women, she possesses the gentle dignity and grace that become a queen.

Lambie, however, represents the all-American type. She's frivolous and very much of a flirt. She's never quiet — always can be heard her unmusical "rooster crow." She lacks social graces though she tries desperately to learn. I could tell you that she is small and white with black ears, but I cannot describe her better than by saying she looks exactly like a little fuzzy lamb — and acts just like one. Incidentally, she also eats ivy, as all good little lambs do.

Lambie's pride and joy are her chubby brown and white quadruplets. Because she pays so little attention to them now, I have taken over what my father calls my "menagerie." Certainly no collection of wild bear-cubs could require more attention. For that reason we call the twins

Big Bear and Little Bear. Big Bear is very intelligent. He figured out scientifically that there was a grand world outside of his box and that by painfully scaling a long flight of stairs it was possible to reach that world. Little Bear is an example of the results of progressive education. Although most affectionate, he presumes himself to be the center of the universe. Lambie, Jr., is a miniature stereotype of her mother. She's as cuddly and playful as a kitten and as independent. Taffy, on the other hand, is rather soft-spoken and the beauty of the four. A more affectionate little family could not be found, for they stay as close to one another as a brood of chicks and sleep in a contortionist's nightmare of interwoven heads and limbs. Such devotion and brotherly love is rarely found in families of human beings.

There are those who dream of a devoted husband, a brand-new automobile, or a beautiful home. There are others who desire success, fame, or a huge bank account. But my idea of happiness is this: I wish to own a huge pice of land, covered with woods and sunny meadows. This estate I would call Dogwood. As its name implies, it would be filled to capacity with romping, healthy, happy dogs. The woods and meadows would be theirs for hunting and hiking; I would provide comfortable kennels for them to sleep in and juicy beef-steaks for them to eat — a dogs' paradise. Oh, that dreams were realities and realities dreams!

As a final thought I submit the following, which might appropriately be called "Doggerel:"

Human friendships depend largely  
on position or wealth;

A dog loves his master because  
he's himself.