



Sleeping Dogs

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Sleeping Dogs

"The dog isn't just man's best friend," Jones said, "he's more than that. Just you look back and see there's been a dog around every great man or woman."

They were in the park, two best friends for the longest time, walking their other best friends through the summer green lawns.

"You came to this conclusion when?" Chaney said, a laughing smile on his face.

Jones stopped, he knelt beside his Mongrel, Tots and rubbed the dog's grateful head.

"See Tots here, I'd be nothing without this dog."

Tots gratefully acknowledged his master's voice and licked Jones's face.

"And you're a great man, I suppose?"

Chaney's dog, Caesar, was a pure bred white all over, pink-eyed English Bull. Unlike Tots, Caesar had something of the old Roman greatness in him. With his pointy head, he stared off into the depths of the park, disinterested in both his master's voice and the voice of his master's friend.

"Well, maybe not, but I'm as good a man as I can be," Jones said. "But you're not listening there, Chaney. Look at Churchill, he didn't have a cat by his side, no, no cat for him."

"Churchill?"

"Well, as an example, yes."

"That's only one, name some more."

Jones, now transferred his rubbing to the grateful belly of Tots. He stared at the dog, then chewed at his lip as he tried to think of names.

"See," Chaney said, "you have one dog on your list. And don't you go mentioning the Queen's Corgi's as an example either. I'd as likely say there were as many cats behind just as many great men and women."

"Greyfriars Bobby, there you go," Jones said.

"That's a tale, not anything real."

"Makes my point though."

"No it doesn't. You'll be telling me Lassie and Rin Tin Tin prove this mad theory of yours next."

Jones stood and said; "Why not?"

"Because they're all just stories, Jonesy, nothing more. Don't get me wrong, I like Caesar here, but I'm not going to leap and say he's the maker of me."

Jones winked. "You ever hear about any cats that did what Greyfirars Bobby did, or Lassie or Rin Tin Tin?"

"Can't say I have."

"And why? A cat can't be a hero like a dog. A cat won't wait around and mourn the grave of an owner. A cat won't rush in there and save the day. You ever heard of a cat sniffing out drugs and explosives? No, you haven't."

"No, I haven't. But that don't make a dog any better than a cat. They're pets, friend, nothing more, nothing less."

Jones bent down next to Tots and unhooked the leash from the collar.

"Really?" he said, as Tots ran off into the summer green.

"They're pets, friend. I can't believe you're talking this nonsense."

"Not nonsense, just look at Tots out there. You telling me that Tots is just a pet?"

Chaney shielded his eyes from the sun; he inspected the frisky mongrel as it chased its own shadow across the lawns.

"Four legs, one muzzle, one wagging tail. I'd say that's a pet all right."

"Ever see a cat do what Tots does?"

"Course I have."

"No you haven't. Bring a cat out here and it'd just run up the nearest tree and forget all about you. Now Tots out there, no matter what he's doing, he'll come running back to me when I call. And more."

"More?"

"Much more." Jones put his fingers into his lips and whistled. Tots forgot his shadow and came running back towards Jones. "Sit, Tots," Jones commanded.

Tots sat.

"Roll over."

Tots rolled.

"Play dead."

Tots corpsed himself.

"See? Now a cat would never do a thing like that. Too busy scratching at your face or chasing a ball of yarn."

"So he knows a few tricks? That's just how dogs are." Chaney glanced at Caesar who wasn't in the least bit interested in learning tricks, old or new. "Well maybe some of them."

"I said there was more, didn't I?" Chaney said.

"What, so you taught him something new? Still doesn't prove your point."

"Maybe it'll prove another point."

"What other point?"

Jones snapped his fingers and Tots came to attention.

"Well, I was thinking about dogs and men, you know that connection, when I got to wondering about Tots here."

"You're doing a lot of wondering lately," Chaney said. "Go on, what wonderful conclusion did you come to?"

"Well I was sat there a couple of nights ago watching Tots here sleeping before the fire. And there he was chasing some rabbit in that dream, or whatever, and I thought to myself how happy he must be."

Chaney glanced at Caesar again.

Caesar didn't look happy. Caesar always looked as if he was staring at the world through some perfectly still lens where everything made sense. But Chaney wasn't about to admit that.

"Dogs are always happy, they're too stupid to be anything else," he said.

"Stupid? You're joking aren't you?" Jones said. "Look at Tots here, happy as the day is long, happy when the day isn't that long either. All he cares for is the occasional pat, a walk now and then, a game of fetch."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying Tots here has it made, not like us stupid apes stood here worrying about this and that. That's not stupid, friend, that's clever."

"So your dog doesn't have a care in the world, doesn't make your theory any stronger."

Jones stooped, picked up a loose stick and threw it far in the distance.

Tots scampered after it.

"Couldn't have him around when I tell you what else I discovered," Jones said.

Chaney gave him a confused look.

"What nonsense are you talking about now?"

"Talking about what I figured out."

"Surprise me," Chaney said, shrugging.

"Well, like I said, I was watching Tots and I thought wouldn't it be great to be like that. Not a care in the world, chasing rabbits and sticks in my dreams. Now wouldn't that be something?"

"I tell you what it would be; insanity." Chaney mimed a phone at his ear. "Hello, looney bin, I have a friend here who's in desperate need of a jacket, you know, the kind with the straps in the back. I'd like it in white."

Jones pushed Chaney's hand down.

"No, hear me out, it's not madness, it's sane as this day we're in."

"What, being a dog is sane now is it?"

"No, but maybe acting like one is, eh?"

"No, it isn't. And watch out, your dog's on its way back, it might overhear what you're saying," Chaney said, his voice filled with a mocking tone.

But Jones was completely serious.

"Oh, yes," he said and locked his lips with a quick mime.

As Tots came to a stop at Jones's feet, he reached down took the stick and threw it again.

"There," he said, "now we can talk a little more."

"Have you gone and lost the last brain cell in your head? What you're proposing isn't just madness, it's impossible."

"I'll propose a little more, shall I?"

"Any way I can stop you?"

Jones smiled. "Once you hear, once you know what I'm talking about you'll want more. Believe me."

And before Chaney could offer any more complaints, Tots ran back and the whole fiasco with the throwing of the stick began again.

"Okay, your dog is gone, you can tell me your big secret now," Chaney said.

"Not so big, small really," Jones said. "Sleep."

"Sleep?"

"Dog sleep. That's the ticket."

"The ticket to where? The loony bin?"

"To happy, that's where. You get your head down and dream like a dog, when you wake up you scamper around without a care in the world. I've been chasing sticks for the last week, I tell you."

Chaney glanced at Caesar.

He wasn't in the habit of talking to his dog, not that Caesar ever listened. But today Caesar was the only sane one in the park.

"You hear what my remarkably mad friend is saying, Caesar?" he said.

Caesar ignored him.

"See even Ceasar here thinks you're mad," Chaney said.

Jones pulled him around.

"Now you just listen. I'm telling you, act like a dog, sleep like one and you'll see the world all fresh and new. It's a tonic."

"It's insane."

"Try it."

"I will not."

"Just try it once. Tonight. Get your head down next to Caesar here, think like a dog and I'll guarantee when morning comes you'll be a whole new man."

"Or I'll be a dog."

Tots came running back.

"Well, nobody can say I didn't try," Jones said.

"That they can't," Chaney replied.

"I'll be seeing you," Jones said as he attached the leash to Tots and walked away.

"Let's hope you don't try and lick my face when you do," Chaney called after him.

But Jones was skipping away and didn't hear a thing.

He sat in the chair watching Caesar sleep.

Madness, utter madness. We're getting old that's all, and Jones is a little older still. He must be losing his mind, that's it. The brain cells just aren't firing like they used to.

But what if there was some truth in it?

What if sleeping like a dog could refresh you, make you skip just like Jones had?

Ahh, rubbish. That skipping, well, that was just some new pills. Something the doctor prescribed. Nothing to do with this crazy idea of his.

You're sure about that?

You ever see a pill make a man act like that, make a friend jump like he was a teenager?

Behind every great man...

Chaney got up, feeling the creak in his joints.

What if it was true though? What if you could run and skip again like a twenty year old? What if Jones had hit upon something so simple that it was brilliant?

He shuffled over to Caesar's dog basket and stopped.

Caesar slept like he woke. He was straight, stiff, on the lookout for something in his dreams. He didn't chase rabbits, he watched them from afar. The only time Caesar ever broke his regal stance was to chase an ice-cream van or a cat.

And if it is true, Chaney thought, then Caesar is no Tots. What kind of dream would I have if I dreamed like Caesar here?

Are you actually thinking about this? Actually going to go through with your crazy friend's ideas?

It couldn't hurt, could it?

Just one night sleeping like a dog. He'd slept in worse places, in worse positions in his life.

And if it was true? Then tomorrow, tomorrow he would be...

He dragged a blanket from the couch, lay it down on the floor and curled himself up.

This is stupid he told himself and closed his eyes.

Dog sleep, what rubbish.

An hour later he let out a small yelp of pleasure.

"I'd like to shake your hand," Chaney said.

"You would?" Jones said.

"Yes, you were right. By God, you were right. Best night's sleep I've ever had. Woke up this morning, well, I could have lifted the world on my shoulders and not felt it."

Jones patted him on the shoulders.

"I told you, didn't I? It's like being born again, or at least happy again."

"I wouldn't have believed it, I didn't believe it. But there I was, just like Caesar here. Not a care in the world. Not a worry."

"In the dream?"

"In the dream, out of the dream. Live like a dog live like a King I say."

"And the dream, what was it, chasing rabbits, running through fields?"

Chaney looked at Caesar.

"Nothing like that," he said.

"Oh, how so?"

"Must be I shared Caesar's dream here. I was sat on a high hill looking down into the fields and knowing that all those fields were mine, that nothing could come in there and take those fields from me."

"No rabbits?"

"Not a rabbit in sight."

"No sticks thrown?"

"Not a twig."

Jones scratched his head.

"Doesn't sound like much of a dog dream?"

Chaney patted Caesar's head.

"Caesar isn't any ordinary dog. Just look at him. He's majestic, probably a King in his own world now I come to think of it."

Jones craned his neck to look at the dog.

"You might be right there. Does that make you a King now?"

"I'd say so. A King who occasionally chases a car, but a King all the same."

"And me?"

"You?"

"Tots is no King, so that makes me what? A jester in our newly found world?"

"If that's what makes you happy, I guess so."

"It does. Yes, a jester. Me and Tots are jesters. But now what do we do?"

"Do?" Chaney asked.

"Do we tell? Let someone else in on the secret?"

Chaney took a Caesar stance and looked out onto the green summer lawns.

"You know what," he said.

"What?"

"I think we should let sleeping dogs lie, how does that sound?"

And before Jones could answer an ice-cream van rattled by on the road beyond the park.

The only answer left was what they did next.

Two dogs and two old men ran through the park and took chase.

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