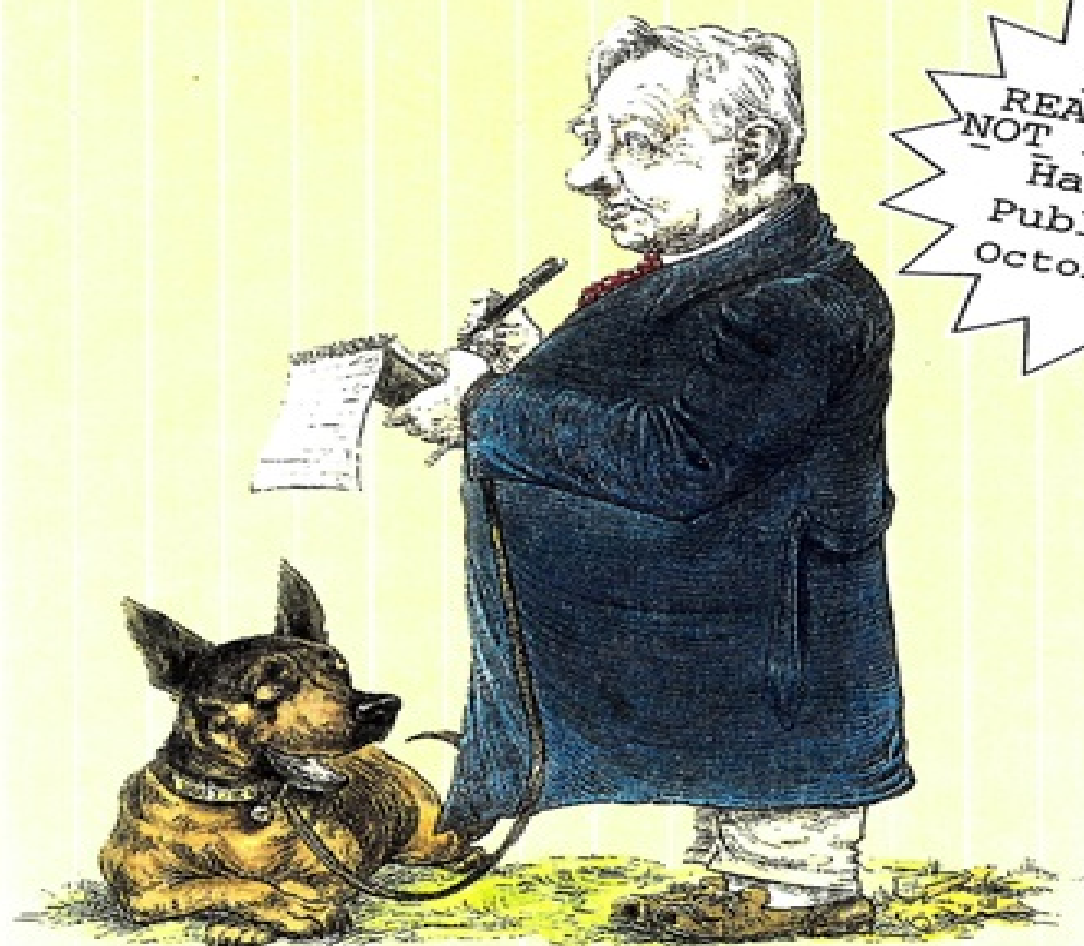


BUSTER'S DIARIES

The True Story of a Dog and His Man



ADVANCE
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NOT FOR RESALE
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AS TOLD TO
ROY HATTERSLEY



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Introduction



My brother and I were born in the overgrown back garden of a house in Paddington London, sometime during February 1995. When we were a few days old, our mother was bitten by a rat and the man who owned her tied her to a fence post and left her to die. For nearly a week, she survived on water which was leaking from a hose, and she fed us till she died. Then Diana, the lady who lived next door rescued us. Being too young and stupid to recognize kindness, after a couple of weeks we ran away and started to live rough. It was the beginning of my fascination with garbage. Even now, with two square meals a day and more biscuits than are good for me, I find black bags and garbage cans irresistible.

We had been vagrants for more than two months when Doris Turner saw us running about on Paddington Recreation Ground. Doris ran the Brent Animal Shelter and decided at once that she must find us a good home. Even then, for reasons I can't explain, I longed for human company. So when Doris called to us, I let her catch me. My brother, being still stupid, ran away again. It was the last time I saw him. Doris said he was my identical twin. Somewhere in North London there is another dog who looks just like me—with the handsome profile of a small Alsatian and the elegant brown-and-gold flecked coat of a Staffordshire bull terrier.

Doris was the first person who ever talked to me. Often I could not understand what she tried to say. But despite that, I liked to listen to the noise she made. Now I understand much more—although I still have difficulty with complicated sentences, especially if they are spoken in a conversational tone. I have a particular problem with subjunctives. But whenever someone speaks to me, I feel happy. Conversation was, I suppose, the beginning of my corruption—or domestication, as humans call it.

Talk is now the noise I hear most often. Because of that, the wolf within me sleeps—although he sometimes dreams. It was the wolf who kept me alive on the Paddington Recreation Ground, but when he dreams, we go back together to the Siberian forest, not to north London. These days I would not swap my bed against the radiator for a patch of frozen moss under a stunted tree. But I am glad that the wolf is still there, snoring away inside me.

When Doris found me, the wolf was still wide awake and I had not yet learnt that a dog has to choose between the luxury of family life and the excitement of the wild. So I expected to live with Doris for ever, listening to her talk when the mood took me and fighting for my life the rest of the time. But Doris, who was old, thought I needed more exercise than she could organize. So she found me a foster home in a flat a couple of roads away from her house. My new owners did their best to burn off my energy but I didn't settle down. Sheila—a "home-checker" for the Battersea Dogs' Home—said I "lacked socialization skills with both dogs and humans." I was taken into canine care. Doris and her friends paid the fees.

The people who ran the dogs' home kept me warm and well fed. But they did not talk to me. Indeed, they did not talk to any of the dogs. That was not so bad for the others. They were only there for a week or two while their owners were on holiday. But I thought I would be there for ever. I lost my appetite and my ribs began to show. Even today, if I think I am going to be left alone, I cannot concentrate on my breakfast.

Hoping somebody would adopt me, my beneficiaries put an advertisement in a dog magazine. It said I was "very clean." That was true. It was also insulting. There are much better things to say about me than that. A lady in Gloucester, who liked bullterrier crossbreeds wrote to say she might adopt me.

But when she saw my picture, I was so thin that she thought I was ill. You have to be a saint to adopt a sick dog.

After a while, I was moved to another kennel in Surrey, where a family kept me—and several other dogs—for more or less nothing. The owners took a special liking to me, perhaps because they were sorry I was so thin or perhaps because they realized what a great dog I would become if someone gave me loving care. They fed me special treats and talked to me a lot. The other dogs did not like me being the favorite. But the wolf inside me kept them in their proper place. I began to grow and put on weight. In fact, I became too healthy for my own good.

I was a victim of the Dangerous Dogs Act. Families which might have adopted me were afraid I would grow into a pit bull terrier, one of the dogs that policemen can take away and shoot. So I stayed at the Surrey kennel for months. Doris died. And I do not know what would have happened to me had Doris's friends not decided on one last advertisement.

Dogs are not supposed to be given as presents. We are for life, not Christmas. But She came to see me at the Surrey orphanage and decided I was “a dog that a Yorkshireman would be proud to own.” The Man—who comes from Yorkshire—was not sure he wanted to own any dog at all. He now denies it. But I happen to know that I spent two unnecessary extra weeks in Surrey while he argued about the problems of keeping a dog in London and worried what would happen when he wanted to go to Italy for his holidays. The solution to the second problem was, of course, perfectly simple. He doesn't go to Italy any more.

However, the Man is not as stupid as his first reaction suggests. One day She brought me home. And as soon as he saw me, he knew he wanted to keep me for ever. I was already asleep, but he kneeled down by the side of my bed and rubbed me behind the ears. He does that a lot. It is one of his signs of affection. So I enjoy it whether my ears are itching or not. At first, I was not sure how we would get on. I had not even begun to wrestle with the dilemma that all young dogs must face—the choice between independence and comfort. The diary is an account of how I have balanced (not always with complete success) instinct and expediency, self-respect and regular meals, independence and listening to somebody's voice to listen to when I feel sad or lonely.

Over the two years the Man and I have become friends. That is why I accept, with good grace, his disruptive habits and stood by him when he was prosecuted after the incident with the greylag goose in St James's Park. Until that day in the spring of 1996, I had taken it for granted that we would live forever in peaceful obscurity. The goose changed all that. I have become public property. Even today, the *Evening Standard* Londoner's Diary telephoned to ask if I had been nominated for one of the “Dog Oscars” and expressed bogus incredulity when told that I was waiting for the Whitbread Prize for Literature for my autobiography.

There have, I admit, been moments when I have enjoyed my fame. I took especial pleasure in the occasion when he was accosted in the street by a lady who told him, “I know what the dog is called but I can't remember your name.” But sometimes the newspapers have gone too far. I would have tolerated their constant intrusion had they told the consistent truth. But they have changed me from a dog into a brindle cliché. I want people to know what really happens as man and dog learn to live together by gradually accepting each other's limitations and acquiring each other's characteristics. There is more to life than chasing postmen.

Other dogs may resent so intimate a description of the historic battle to reconcile pride in one's nature with the comforts of human civilization. To those whom I have offended, I offer my apologies and I express my profound gratitude to the Man for his assistance in putting my diary on paper—though I think he may have invented one or two stories to make it more interesting. Anyway, most of

it is true. My earnest wish is that, by working with me on my diaries, he will have found some compensation for his own literary disappointments. These days his frustration is most frequently demonstrated by the constant repetition of third-rate poetry. In our early days he was—insensitive, you may think—particularly addicted to a line from Oliver Goldsmith: “Puppy mongrel, whelp and hound and cur of low degree.” I have learnt to live with such indignities.

I hope that my story will be an inspiration to young dogs everywhere. Do not think of it as a bar-and-tell expose. It is the account of an odyssey which took a crossbreed orphan from living rough on a public park to the comfort and security of South West London. Within a year of leaving the dogs orphanage, I was accused (in the *Daily Telegraph*) of being so middle class that I slept on a bean bag. It was not true. But the accusation—by its source and its nature—illustrates how far and how fast I have traveled. I hope you will enjoy my account of the journey.

Deliverance



In which Buster, a dog of spirit and fortitude, is saved from a life of want and degradation, and begins to experience both the penalties and the privileges of domestication.

December 17, 1995—London

I think I shall like it here. There are no other dogs, but there is a Man who would like to be one. When I arrived he got down on his hands and knees, and although he told me to stop licking his face, I knew he didn't mean it. Tomorrow I shall try chewing his ear. Thanks to my dominant personality and animal cunning, I may well become leader of this pack. And even if I don't, there will be real human beings to talk to me.

Everybody was very good about the vomit. The Man helped clean out the animal ambulance (broken-down old van) and told the driver that I must suffer from motion sickness as I didn't seem to be the nervous type. To be honest, I was terrified. Nobody had told me where I was going or what sort of people were going to look after me. Although I look like one of those fighting dogs in the Sunday newspapers' color magazines, I often feel very insecure. I certainly don't see myself doing ten rounds with a rottweiler. Whenever a skinhead came into the dogs' home, I sat at the back of my kennel and tried to look like a Pekinese.

The dogs' home sent the Man my blue plastic bed—which was wrong, since it gave a false impression. I am absolutely house-trained. The Man had a new bed ready for me. It is woolly with fake sheepskin on the bottom and there is a tartan rug spread over it. I got in straight away. The only thing wrong with the bed is that it has no smell. I shall put that right in the next day or two.

The Man is very inconsistent—the very worst thing possible if he wants a proper relationship with me. As soon as I curled up in a ball, he forgot all about me looking tough and self-confident and said, “He really looks a friendly little chap. I can't believe that anyone was frightened of adopting him. He doesn't look a bit fierce.” I almost bit him there and then. I look very fierce indeed standing up—especially when my mouth is open. He will find out in the morning.

He is the talkative type, which is exactly what I wanted. Before I went to sleep he told me that he signed a form promising not to tie me up, lock me out or give me away. If I behave badly and he doesn't want me any more, I have to go back to the dogs' home. Assuming the food is OK, I shall make myself irresistible. It will not be difficult.

December 18, 1995

The Man has decided that I shall be called Buster. That was not my name before I came to live with him. But since I cannot remember what my old name was, the change does not matter. The Man says my old name made me sound like a hairdresser who is engaged to a second-division soccer player.

I think he is a bit of a snob. So am I. At least we have something in common. I think he must have been sorry he was rude about second-division soccer players' wives. For he began to invent other reasons for calling me Buster. The Man says that I have an optimistic walk, cheerful ears and that my bottom sways with self-confidence. I have no idea what he is talking about. I doubt if even humans understand that sort of nonsense. Still, if he sticks to the one name, I shall soon begin to come when he calls.

December 20, 1995

The food is the same as I got at the dogs' home. It looks like little balls of sawdust. The Man is not allowed to give me my food. When She measures it out, She uses a little glass with lines round the side to make sure I don't get too much. She does not measure out his food. He keeps saying how good it is for me to eat healthy food—usually whilst he is eating chocolate cookies.

I do get "treats." They are dog biscuits, desiccated pigs' ears, rolled, knotted and braided pieces of hide.

There are special rituals associated with treats. Before I get a pig's ear, I have to bark very loudly and he has to say, "For God's sake quieten down." I get a biscuit after he tells me, "Sit!... Down!" or "Stay!" or "Wait!" My part in the strange ceremony—which takes place about once every ten minutes—is just doing what he suggests. The ceremony is called "training." He read about it in a book he got from the pet shop.

The book explained that dogs are pack animals and that he must not let me be leader. He must never allow me to go first through a door, always move me out of the way rather than step over me and stop me from jumping on his knee unless he invites me up. The book says it is easy for the Man to stop me being leader of the pack if only he makes clear who is boss.

I don't want him to make clear who is boss. It is bad enough when he just tries. For example, he totally misunderstands chewing. It is a sign of affection from one pack member to another. But as soon as my molars touch his hand he shouts, "Stop! Stop! Stop! Nobody likes teeth except Buster." I like them a lot. If we had the relationship of equals, he would chew me back.

December 25, 1995

There were so many people in the house that nobody took any interest in me. They all said, "Hello Buster," and one or two patted me on the head. But for most of the time, I was completely ignored—except when I tried to share the potato crisps and little cookies that everybody else was eating. The Man said that if I howled I would go outside into the hall.

I did not mean to spill the whole plate of little sausages all over the floor. All I wanted to do was have a close smell of them and, perhaps, steal one when nobody was looking. The Man said he was less worried about the marks on the carpet than the risk of me choking on one of the little sticks that were stuck into the sausages. But he still put me outside in the hall. I howled.

After I had howled for about an hour, they all moved into the dining room. Hundreds of dishes of food had to be carried from the kitchen along the hall so, naturally enough, I was able to barge my way in when the door was left open. The Man said I would lie quietly on his feet and promised not to feed me bits of turkey. Because he kept his promise, I did not lie quietly at his feet. When I stood on my hind legs and put my feet on the table, I was put out into the hall again. I howled.

When the people went home, they all said how much they had enjoyed themselves. I did not enjoy myself. Before they left, I was shut in the kitchen, with all the food locked away in cupboards. When he took me for my late-night walk, the Man said, "Buster, you're stupid. If you'd been well behaved you could have stayed with me and picked up the food I dropped." I don't know if he meant dropped by mistake or dropped specially for me.

I shall think about what he said. Being well behaved when there are strange people about is more

difficult than he thinks—especially if some of them smell of fear. But I would have liked the dropped food. Today was a Christmas. If there is another one next week, I shall try to make the best of it.

December 29, 1995

I think the Man must be a slow learner. She picked up the idea in a couple of weeks. Calm voice. Authoritative tone. Firm information. Whenever he rebukes me, he either shouts or giggles, which is very bad. Sometimes he does both at the same time, which is even worse. Then, even if I haven't quite done what he tells me, he gives me a hug. If we go on in this way I shall never learn how to behave.

I am beginning to learn about the Man. I don't think he is leader of our pack. I am not even sure he wants to be. He certainly does not control the food and seems very happy to move out of the way when somebody wants to walk past. He also lets other people go out the door first—all signs that he has given up the battle for supremacy. I think he wants to be a friend rather than leader. That is good. He means he talks to me a lot. But it will cause trouble if, one day, he changes his mind and wants to be leader after all.

January 1, 1996—Hassop, Derbyshire

I ran away last night, or perhaps it was early this morning. I cannot be sure because it was dark and I was half asleep when I did it.

We were in a hotel—which is a big house with dozens of rooms. But we only had one. So I was supposed to sleep on the floor next to the bed with only a blanket out of the Man's car to lie on. I didn't mind sleeping on the floor, but the Man said, "We must do better next time. It will be our fault if he jumps on the bed during the night." I would have jumped on the bed whatever they had brought for me to sleep on.

After my early-evening walk, I was left on my own for hours. I slept in the middle of the bed until they came back, but when I woke up I could not remember where I was. I could, however, hear two distant voices calling me. So I sidestepped the Man, who stood in the open door, and ran out onto the landing. By then I was properly awake and I picked up the scent of the dogs whose call I had heard from the bedroom. It led me down the stairs, along the hall into the dining room (past people in paper hats) and out into the kitchen. I barely needed to look up. The sound and the smell planned my exact route.

There were torches burning in the drive outside the kitchen and I ran on between them, out into the road, past the church and round the back of a pub called the Eyre Arms. It was too dark to see the two Pyrenean mountain dogs that lived behind the fence in the garden. But I listened to them howling and they howled back.

I had been there for about ten minutes when the Man arrived. "God, Buster," he said, "you might have been run over in the road." He had forgotten to bring my lead so he had to tie his handkerchief to my collar. His handkerchief is shorter than my lead, so he had to walk home bending down. "I knew you'd be with those dogs," he told me. Perhaps he is beginning to learn.

January 3, 1996—London

I have begun to settle down. I always expected to like it here, but at first, when I woke up in the middle of the night, I wondered if natural optimism had warped my judgment. But that was when I still thought the Man ought to let me sleep with him. Now I've stopped thinking about that and I only wake up in the night if somebody noisy goes past the front door and growling is necessary to drive them away.

January 4, 1996

Perhaps he has not learnt as much about dogs as I thought when he picked up the scent of the Pyrenean mountain dogs. He still does not realize that I don't go out just for exercise. I go out to sniff about and put my head in holes. Sometimes he is so anxious to get me into running-about territory that I hurries me past every garbage can and crumbling wall. "What's in a life so full of care there is no time to stand and sniff?" I ask myself.

January 5, 1996

Trouble on the way home from the park. All the big houses in Buckingham Gate have holes in the walls with scrapers inside them on which people used to clean their muddy boots. The holes are now used for hiding old candy papers, cookie wrappers, milk cartons and, best of all, leftover chicken. He got impatient when I wanted to make a detailed examination of a potato crisp packet, and jerked very hard on my lead. This is not how the people at the dogs' rescue expected him to behave.

January 10, 1996

I had a nasty turn this morning when, for a moment, I thought that things were turning ugly. No soon after we had got back from our walk than the Man went to my cupboard—which I had been led to believe contained nothing but biscuits and sawdust balls—and got out a piece of wood with wires sticking out at one end. Grabbing me by the collar he began to menace me with this strange object which I described as a brush.

'You will like it, Buster,' he said, as he always does in preparation for doing something that I do not like at all. He then began to run the wire bits along my back. Naturally I struggled. But he held on and struck ineffectual blows in the direction of my tail. As always when in difficulty, She was called and She operated the instrument whilst he held me down. To my surprise, the result was quite pleasant, not to say mildly erotic.

"Turn it over," the Man said—referring to the brush not to me. I am always called "him." A soft part then rubbed along my back whilst he talked the usual guff about my coat shining. He also did on my stomach and managed to hit my sensitive bits only once.

January 13, 1996

He is no longer rational about the food I find on the pavement. As soon as we got out on the street tonight, he began to go on about chicken, which he says contain bones that will get stuck in my throat and choke me to death. The fast-food restaurants were in full swing. So the Man walked about staring at the pavement a yard in front of him. He has set himself up as a dropped-chicken patrol. I still found the chicken first. I'm lower down and he has no sense of smell. Of course, he told me to "Drop it" and began to force my mouth open. He does not realize that trying to take food from between my teeth puts me in more danger than letting me chew it slowly. I naturally react by trying to swallow it down whole. This morning he got to me before I had time to gulp, forced my jaws open and pushed his fingers down my throat as though he were trying to make me sick. When he scraped out the half-masticated meat and the fragments of shattered bone, he made a noise as if he was going to be ill, and said, "Disgusting!" You would have thought I had asked him to do it.

Then, of course, we went through the usual "Bad dog" ritual. I remained remarkably forbearing. I am instinctively opposed to having food taken out of my mouth. But all I did was hang on to what I had found and therefore was rightfully mine. He got his knuckles bruised and his thumb squashed. If he had wanted to, I could have bitten his fingers off one by one. But I didn't. I think I am beginning to feel affectionate towards him. I must not let it come between me and garbage.

January 15, 1996

Where I live now, there are great smells. There were smells at the dogs' home, but I knew where they came from, and the dogs who made them thought it was their territory as well as mine. In the streets around here, the smells are all mysterious and each one has to be investigated to see if it was made by a potential intruder.

I take each one very seriously, sniffing from its origin on wall, mail slot or lamppost all the way to where it ends at the pavement's edge. Throughout the examination, my nose is as close to the flagstones as it is possible to be without wearing the end away. Once I have completed my investigation, I have a clear mental picture of the culprit and possible interloper. "Middle-aged bit of shit. Less than one foot from ground. Long-haired. Possibly dachshund. No threat." When a threat is located, I eliminate it by urinating on the spot that the intruder has defiled. As is well known, the last dog to urinate on a spot has staked his claim to domination of the territory. I am a miracle of nature, a walking DNA machine.

January 19, 1996

I fear I have discovered something distasteful about the Man. He collects excrement. Usually—my toilette completed—I am too busy expressing the joy of defecation to notice what's going on. But this morning, I kicked so hard with my back feet that I swung completely round. The Man had a plastic bag on his hand like a glove and was furtively bending down over the place where I had squatted. He was picking up what I had dropped.

He was very careful to retrieve every particle. He tied the bag in a double knot, took it to one of those cans in which delicacies are stored—old teacakes, the edges of half-eaten sandwiches and coffee fries—and dropped it in. While all this was going on, I had to wait for the biscuit which is the proper reward of my incredibly regular habits.

January 21, 1996

Today, the excrement collection syndrome took a turn for the worse. During the early-morning walk, he tried to persuade an unknown lady to do the same—the pervert’s typical behavior pattern. When the lady refused to accept his plastic bag, the Man turned nasty and started to shout about “getting us all a bad name.” I cannot imagine why he should want that.

I have made excrement collection as hard as possible in the hope that I can stop him doing it. Yesterday lunchtime I backed up against a chicken wire fence and in the evening I sat on a rose bush. This morning, in St James’s Park, I crawled under a giant rhododendron. But even when he hit his head on a branch, he still wouldn’t stop. I am worried in case there are more unpleasant habits yet to be revealed.

It is hard for me to struggle against my primitive instincts if the Man—who is supposed to civilize me—behaves like something out of the Stone Age.

January 22, 1996

Another example of double standards! Scratching is fine for people but forbidden to dogs. The Man scratches all the time. And everywhere. But if I put my paw within an inch of my ear, they both leap on me and exact a punishment which is out of all proportion to the crime.

The Man makes me sit between his feet, holds me round the chest with one arm and clamps my jaws shut with his free hand. Then, believe it or not, She squirts me in the ear. The squirt does not hurt, but it does feel very funny. And it is only the beginning of the torture. The Man then rubs my ear against my head, while She shouts, “Not too hard. Not too hard. The vet said do it gently.”

When he stops rubbing, I can still feel the squirt inside my ear. So I shake my head very hard. A lot of the squirt flies out and makes spots on the Man’s trousers. That is one thing about being squirted in the ear that I like.

January 23, 1996—Liverpool

Yesterday we went on our first railway journey. The Man promised me it would be exciting. I think it was more exciting than he intended.

The first part was extremely boring. I sat under the table in the carriage of a railway train and held onto my collar—usually with both hands. All I could see was feet. I don’t bark, but I tried to growl at some of them. He held my jaws together as soon as I gave the first rumble. When we got on the train he said, “That wasn’t bad for the first time. You’ll get to like it.” I shall never get to like

having my jaws held together.

~~We then walked to what is called the Adelphi Hotel. He went in through a door which, instead of opening properly, swings round in a circle. We had to walk round inside it. I was quite frightened and I would have been more frightened still if the Man had not been inside the door with me. There was not much room and he stood on my tail, but I was glad he was there.~~

The Man said that I was very good in the elevator. The elevator is a very little room. When you get in it, it seems to float up in the air. I liked the floating feeling and sat very quietly in the corner. A stranger in the elevator said, "What a good dog." So when we got to the bedroom at the end of a very long corridor, I was very pleased with myself and jumped on the bed straight away. The Man pushed me off, but not before I had sniffed his suitcase. It was stuffed full of sawdust balls and biscuits.

Before he went out and left me all alone, the Man talked about me on the telephone. I always enjoy listening when the Man talks about me. "Buster is here," he said. "Nobody must come in or open the door." He then spoilt it all by adding, "He's perfectly friendly. I'm just afraid of him running out and getting lost. He's got a lot to learn." I would rather be unfriendly than have a lot to learn.

I always go to sleep when he is not there. So I do not know how long he had been gone before the lady came into the room. She was carrying towels. When I growled at her she looked very frightened. She opened the door of the little room in which he had put his suitcase and looked inside. Then she opened another door, went in and came out again without the towels. I was still growling, so she ran across the room and disappeared through the door into the corridor. She slammed the outside door behind her. But she left the other doors open.

The bathroom only smelt of soap. The little room—smaller even than the elevator—smelt wonderful. His suitcase was open, and I could see two days' rations of sawdust balls measured out in plastic bags. There were also two packets of custard cream cookies which the hotel had left for him when he made himself a cup of tea. I ate the cookies first. They were only wrapped in paper. They tasted the same as the cookies.

The bags into which he had measured the sawdust balls were thick plastic, but I tore them open one by one. It all went to prove that he starves me. I ate two extra days' rations and six custard cream cookies (and their wrapping paper) without any difficulty. At least, there was no difficulty at first.

Normally I sleep very peacefully. But that night in the Adelphi Hotel I dreamt that there was a great worm in my stomach and, no matter how much worm medicine the Man gave me, the worm just grew and grew until it made me burst. I was very glad when the Man came back but I felt too heavy round the middle to jump up and greet him with my usual nip at his hand, tug at his sleeve and double-pawed punch in the groin. He was, however, very cheerful. "Buster," he said, "lying there like that you look pregnant." When I still did not move, he walked across to me and began to scratch my stomach. The giant worm turned into a lead ball. So I did not even roll over on my back. "Good Almighty," the Man said, kneeling down as he always does when he is worried about me. "You've been poisoned." Then he noticed that the door to the little room was open and that the plastic bags were split and empty.

I had never been out so late before. But, although my bowels were in turmoil, we walked and walked. The Adelphi Hotel is in a very noisy and dirty city so we walked through piles of litter. I do not want to eat any of it. Every time we stopped, the Man said, "Good boy. That's the idea. We're beginning to walk it off." Once a youth who was passing where I was crouched down asked his friend, "Did you make that noise or was it the dog?" His friend pushed him and he pushed his friend back. The Man said, "Watch it, this is a very sensitive dog, although he may not sound it." They all laughed. I do not know why.

As usual, I woke up at seven o'clock feeling as fit as one of the fleas I do not have. The Man had only pushed me off the bed once. The second time I climbed on, he let me stay there. He did not wait up for a long time. I am very worried there is nothing left for me to eat for breakfast.

January 30, 1996—London

He has read in one of his books that the best way to intimidate me is to make a growling sound and believe it or not, he is trying to do it. The noise he produces is pathetic. He sounds like a croak between whooping cough and a leaky bagpipe. And he can't keep it up for more than about two seconds. Then he chokes, splutters, wheezes and collapses into the nearest chair.

The book recommends "an additional disciplinary technique to supplement growling." It is equally incredible. He is supposed to ignore me when he comes home. The idea is that he walks in, I throw myself at him, and he takes absolutely no notice. If I go on throwing myself at him, he is supposed to go on not noticing until I realize that I am a dog of absolute insignificance who should not speak unless he is spoken to.

Who writes these books? Nobody who has ever owned a dog, that's for sure. When I'm at my jumping best, I am absolutely irresistible. It is not just that I am too attractive to ignore. If he took any notice of me, I would tear his sleeve off. Dogs react best to affection.

February 2, 1996

The disciplinary offensive is now concentrating on jumping, which is totally unreasonable. I am a cheery chap. That is why, when I walk, my bottom moves from side to side even if my tail is not wagging. Everybody likes that and says, "Buster is a cheery chap." It is also because I am a cheery chap that I jump up at everybody who comes into the house and most people I meet in the street. But nobody seems to like that as much as they like my bottom moving from side to side when I walk down the street. The Man says, "I know he is a bit of a handful, but he wasn't part of a family for the first nine months." And She tells the Man, "It's in his own interests to teach him not to frighten people." It is in my own interests, handful or not, to be a cheery chappy. It is also in theirs. I can't be cheery and not jump. They'll learn with time.

February 15, 1996

I have retractable ears. They are not always the advantage that they may seem to animals whose ears are entirely immobile. When they are erect in their listening mode, people always say, "Look at Buster. He can understand every word we say." This is good, though it is not entirely true. Some words—particularly "Buster" and "breakfast"—I recognize at once, though my ears often go rigid at the sound of rustling paper in the mistaken belief that biscuits are about. However, when my ears lie flat in their hunting mode, people still say, "Look at Buster." But they think that I am about to pounce. This is sometimes true, but not always. Sometimes my ears just go flat for no particular reason.

February 19, 1996

The Man has still not learnt the problems I am caused by inconsistent behavior. Normally—despite my passion for cheese—all I ever get are the crumbs which bounce off his stomach and land on the floor beneath the table. Even then he makes a lot of fuss about me not picking up the bigger bits.

This morning, however, I was sent for and given a substantial piece of Stilton cheese. Admittedly the Man had rolled it into a ball. But I have absolutely nothing against the taste of human sweat and I gobbled it down with my usual enthusiasm. For the next two hours the Man followed me round the house. I had only to get up from the sofa or go into the kitchen for a bit of water for him to ask me “Do you want to go out, Buster?” I always want to go out. But I have got used to the routine of four walks a day. To be asked the question every ten minutes from ten o’clock until twelve was strangely unnerving.

Strangely enough, instead of feeling the urge to walk at two, I was anxious for a trip to Vincent Square more than an hour earlier than usual. The Man is not normally home at lunchtime. But on what I think of as Cheese Day, he had hung around the house all day and, to my astonishment, had my lead on within thirty seconds. We almost ran out of the door. Nothing particularly unusual happened while we were out. But when we got back, the Man was positively triumphant. “The worm pill works exactly as it promises on the packet,” he said.

February 20, 1996—Sheffield

We have come to see the Man’s mother. She is very old—probably fourteen or fifteen. She thinks she knows all about dogs and goes on about Mick, Joey, Bess, Dinah and Magnus. All of them were intelligent, loyal, well behaved, etc., etc. But none of them compares with Sally.

Sally is the ugliest bitch you’ve ever seen. She looks as if she is two half-dogs stitched together in the middle. Sally came from the RSPCA and was tortured when a puppy. The Man’s mother kept describing the terrible things that happened to her. The stories made my tail go all limp and hang between my back legs. She then asked who had tortured me before I went to the dogs’ home. She thinks all rescue dogs are tortured first.

I was not allowed into his mother’s house until he had been inside and hidden all Sally’s food. Although the Man’s mother is a vegetarian, she says it would be wrong to force her prejudices on a dog, so she buys chicken to give to Sally. I think his mother is right, but he thinks her behavior is very funny. He believes in forcing his prejudices on people—particularly me. He shouts, “Wait!... Quiet!... Sit down!” all the time.

His mother sat in a big armchair with two cushions behind her, and Sally on the cushions. If Sally interrupted her by whining, his mother elbowed her off the cushion before continuing her stories about other people’s cruelty to dogs. From the front it looked like Long John Silver and his parrot, not the Man’s mother and the ugliest bitch you’ve ever seen. I sat next to the little table with the tea tray on it and looked winning by putting my head on one side. It did the trick at once. “Can I give him a piece of cake?” his mother asked. “No,” he said. “Buster doesn’t eat cake and he doesn’t eat at the table.”

“It’s not at the table,” his mother said. “And cake is good for him.” Then they began to argue about what is good for me. I was terribly embarrassed. But Sally—no doubt used to that sort of thing—seemed not to mind. “I had dogs before you were born,” the Man’s mother said. “And killed them with

rich food,” he replied. He was making an unkind reference to Magnus—a Yorkshire terrier with pedigree and long name—who died young of a heart attack. The Man says it was the cake that killed him. I put it down to the inbreeding.

February 28, 1996—Derbyshire

We have come to inspect a house which he is having renovated. There are workmen everywhere and the Man says they are not even trying to get the job done on time. I am sure he is right. As soon as they try to help, they stop working—especially if they are bending down.

Outside the house there are fields and in the fields there are animals I have never seen before called sheep and cows. Although the cows are bigger than the sheep, they are just as stupid. When I walk towards them, they run away. If they just stood there, I’d have a sniff and wander on. But when they turn their backs and run, the wolf in me takes over and I think that I am chasing my dinner through the primeval forest. The Man said, “This is going to be a problem.” But I think it will be more of a problem for the cows and sheep than for me.

The house which is being renovated has a lot of stairs and two gardens with steps in them. Wherever the Man may be, I can nearly always be higher than he is—that stops him thinking he is the leader of the pack. At one end of the garden there is a big hedge. A Labrador puppy lives in a kennel in the garden on the other side. I tried to rescue it as soon as I was let out of the back door, but got stuck between the hedge and the chicken wire, which nobody told me was there. Whilst I waited for the Man to let me out, I howled a lot. He said that if I went on causing trouble I’d have to live in a kennel in the garden. I don’t believe him.

I enjoyed the drive home. Driving—as long as you know where you are going—is great fun, especially the bit when you wake up, stand on the backseat, put your paws on the driver’s shoulder and lick his ear. I think I liked the standing-up part more than the Man did.

Troubled Times



In which Buster is ill, and, after his miraculous recovery, has two unfortunate meetings, the first with a royal goose and the second with a London policeman.

March 1, 1996—London

We have been to Paws U Like, the pet shop or (as it now calls itself) the Westminster Animal Companions” Centre.

It was full of things to eat—tins of meat (all “as advertised on television” and some of them “the food of champions”), sacks full of sawdust balls I am given every morning, biscuits in dozens of different shapes and with hundreds of different tastes, white mice, ger-bils, budgerigars and hamsters. We bought nothing of any value. All we brought home was a cardboard box on which was printed (in big red letters) PRECIOUS CARGO. Underneath it said, “When you travel, make sure your pet is as safe as you are.”

Inside the box there was what the Man called “Buster’s braces”—scarlet webbing and buckles which he says I must wear every time I go in the car. He tried to put it on me as soon as we got home. I did all I could to help by rolling about on the floor and chewing the loose ends of the webbing, but I still could not work out which loops my legs went into and how to fasten the buckle at the back of my neck. He almost strangled me twice. Getting the harness on will add twenty minutes to every journey. With any luck he will get bored and throw it away in a week or two.

While I was choking to death, with the webbing pressing against my windpipe, the Man told me that it was all being done for my own good. He said that, being just a dog, I wouldn’t see a crash coming so, when it happened, I wouldn’t have braced myself and I would fly about inside the car like a giant, furry squash ball. What I can’t understand is why, if he can see the crash coming, we have to crash.

Once Precious Cargo is buckled on, it is comfortable enough—and rather dashing in its way. I look as if I am about to parachute into enemy territory for purposes too secret to describe. But when it is used to make me as safe as he is, the result is a disaster. For the buckle between my shoulder blades is attached to the backseat safety belt and, although I can sit or lie down, prancing about is impossible. I am beginning to learn about caution and restraint. But without the freedom to prance, driving will lose its joy.

March 4, 1996

I have been very ill. At first I thought it was the usual stomach trouble caused by eating filth. So I rushed about looking for grass to eat. Grass makes me sick. There is no grass in our house. So I got very agitated and started chewing the doormat in the hope it would have the same effect.

It was very late, but the Man took me out and I ate a lot of real grass and was sick. I am very good at being sick. Once my stomach is full of grass I can vomit at will, contracting muscles so that I rip from tail to head. It always makes me feel better. Last night I felt better for only a couple of hours then I felt even worse than before. I started rushing around again—forgetting that there is no grass in the house—and bumped into all the chairs and tables. The Man got out of bed looking very frightened and asked me, “Are you all right?” It was a silly question.

The Man knelt down and started to rub behind my ears. That is what he always does when he worried about me. ~~Rubbing behind my ears was the last thing I wanted, so I ran off looking for grass~~ in the dining room. While I was under the table he made a telephone call. Then he put his trousers over his pyjamas and we went into the car. There was no grass in the car. I did not look forward to the journey, but the Man said, “We are going to see the vet,” as if I would be pleased by the news. I do not like vets. When I was very young, a vet stuck a needle in me.

The Man lifted me onto a table and the vet squeezed my stomach. I do not like strangers squeezing my stomach, so I tried to bite him. The vet said he would have to take a photograph of my inside before he could make me feel better. He then stuck a needle in me. It made me go to sleep.

When I woke up, I was in a cage in the vet’s cellar. At first I was very frightened because I thought I was back at the dogs’ home. So I howled a lot. Then the Man came in, knelt down and rubbed behind my ears as usual. When I saw him, I knew everything would be all right.

On the way home, he told me what was wrong with me. A bit of chicken I had picked up on the road had been wrapped in something called “plastic wrap” which is invisible. Even the photographs inside my stomach missed it at first, so I am not to be blamed for not seeing it. The plastic wrap had blocked up my bowels. “You’ve got to get rid of it,” he said, “or we’ll have to cut you open.” I think he thought that would encourage me to take the medicine the vet had given us.

The Man went on and on about not eating rubbish. “How many times have I told you that it would make you ill?” He did not expect an answer, but said, “There should be a law against dropping chicken in the street.” He is wrong. Chicken that has been walked on is one of life’s great delights. When he told me that taking me out at night was “like going for a walk with a vacuum cleaner,” I pretended to be sick again.

March 10, 1996

Getting rid of the plastic wrap was wonderful. Every three hours for a full day he gave me a spoonful of medicine called liquid paraffin. Then we went for a walk. The walks got very boring, but the liquid paraffin had a sticky sweet taste. After the third dose, I tried to eat the spoon.

At four o’clock this morning—I think it was the seventh walk, but I lost count—he poked about with an old walking stick he had suddenly started to carry and said, “Thank God. At last.” When we got back home, I sat down and waited for a spoonful of medicine. “Look,” the Man said, “Buster is addicted to liquid paraffin.” Then he went to bed.

March 12, 1996

When the telephone rang this morning, I barked. It made everybody jump, including me, for I had never barked before. Now that I have started, I don’t think I will ever stop. People always jump when I bark, and making people jump is one of my greatest pleasures.

March 14, 1996

He has got it into his head that I am overprivileged. “Never done a day’s work in your life.” He does not understand that my job is looking after him. I wake him up as soon as the newspapers are delivered. I chew the mail before he opens it. I protect him from cats and keep him fit by taking him for a walk four times a day. Now that I can bark, he is protected from people who want to talk to him on the street. I make so much noise that he always says, “Sorry about this,” and walks away.

The best part of my job is making him grin like an idiot by rolling on my back, lying with my legs in the air, jumping on his knee or just acting with endearing charm—which I do most of the time. Sometimes I think I have an even more important job. That is to take the blame for things I did not do. Marks on the carpet. Chairs overturned. Newspapers torn in half. Deliveries that are never made. Someone always says, “It must be Buster’s fault.” That part of my job is full-time.

March 17, 1996

We went back to the vet’s to make sure I am fit and well. He did not squeeze my stomach. That may be because I look so healthy or because I tried to bite him the last time he did it. The Man asked him about my food, and the vet said he had once eaten sawdust balls himself, just as a test. It was the only dog food he would consider eating. The difference between the vet and me is that he ate them once, I eat them all the time.

The vet went on to the Man about how sawdust balls kept me regular and healthy. But the Man asked, “Wouldn’t he prefer boiled offal and chicken from the supermarket, like the food my mother gives to her dog, Sally?” The vet replied, “He would prefer decomposed rats that he dug up from under hedges.” The vet was right. Then he said, “But it would not be good for him.” That spoiled everything.

The Man said, “Perhaps we don’t give him enough to eat. We always stick to what it says on the packet. But he still picks up all the filth on the road. Perhaps he is really hungry.” The vet then said a very wicked thing. “Greedy dogs like Buster want to eat all the time and will eat anything.”

From now on, the Man will make jokes about “greedy dogs like Buster.” I do not think they are very funny.

March 20, 1996

One of the nicest times is when the Man comes home at night. He always wants to sit on the sofa and watch television. I sit next to him and spill his tea by leaning against his arm just as he begins to drink it. He puts his arm round me and says, “Careful Buster.” I am never careful. I lick his face and then leap on him. She says, “He is trying to dominate you. It’s not affection, it’s an attempt to dominate.” By then I have got my feet on his shoulders and his face is wet all over. The Man says, “It’s not an attempt. He’s succeeding.” When I calm down, he talks to me about what he has been doing all day. Sometimes I don’t understand the details, but I like the noise he makes.

The Man scratches my stomach and I lie across his knee in ridiculous positions, often with my head hanging over the side of the sofa and all four feet up in the air. I stay there until the Man says, “Let’s go to bed, Buster.” Then I run into my bed and go to sleep straight away. There is general agreement that I am very good at going to bed when told. That is because I would have liked to go

bed much earlier. I get bored with the Man talking to me about his day. On most nights I want to go to bed half an hour before he tells me to, but I don't like to hurt his feelings.

March 23, 1996

The Man says we have to talk seriously about discipline. He says I have no idea what the word means. That is true. I know he read about it in a book when he first adopted me. As far as I can remember, it involves constant pointless indignities.

I am no longer allowed to go through doors before he does. I have only to get my nose over the threshold for him to shout, "Back up! Back up!" I am then expected to walk backwards and stand absolutely still until he goes out in front of me. He has decided to prove that he is senior to me in the pack. It is obvious to me that he isn't. If he were leader, instead of all this "Back up!" and "Sit!" nonsense, he would just bite me when I annoy him.

April 6, 1996

There has been an incident. The newspapers said it took place in the park, but my behavior in the park was perfectly normal. The extraordinary event happened in the street when we were on our way home from the morning's walk. A police car pulled up alongside us. Two police officers got out, one of each sort. The policeman spoke. "Excuse me, Sir. Has your dog killed a goose in St James's Park?" I asked. "Not that I know of," the Man replied, looking startled.

The policewoman patted me on the side of the head in the way that the RSPCA recommend for greeting strange dogs. She held up her hand as if she were stopping traffic. It had blood on it. "Good God," the Man said. Then the policewoman ran her finger round the inside of my collar. A lot of feathers came out. The police officer told the Man, "Get in the car." The Man got in the front seat. I jumped on his knee and, since I was facing him, I licked his face. He said, "For God's sake, not now, Buster." The policeman said, "You are not obliged to say anything, but if you fail to mention something that you subsequently use in evidence..." When we got home, the Man said, "You've really done it this time, Buster."

The police say I broke the law by being off the lead in the park. It is not true. I had not been off the lead. But the Man had. He was bending down doing his usual peculiar business with the plastic bag when I gave the expanding lead a big tug. He let go. So I trotted off, and ended up in the rhododendron bushes, with the lead trailing behind me. For several minutes, he was totally out of my control and in breach of the park's regulations.

I was not alone in the rhododendron bushes for long. Suddenly a goose appeared. Geese are supposed to be frightened by dogs and fly away. But this one barely seemed to notice that I was there. It just fluttered its wings a bit and went on pecking the ground. Naturally I was offended. So I gave it a nip in the back of the neck. It waddled off, and I went into my stalking mode. When it flopped over the fence between the path and the pond, I lost interest. How was I to know that it belonged to the Queen?

April 9, 1996

The newspapers found out about the goose. The Man thinks a gardener was given a biscuit for telling them. This morning there were photographers waiting for us when we went for our walk. We sat on a park bench whilst they took our picture. I was the star, gazing up at him like Man's Best Friend and licking his face. The *Evening Standard* had a billboard, "Park Murder Suspect: First Pictures."

Most of the reports were lies. Some said I had bitten the goose's head off. Others said it lay eviscerated on the path. The Man explained that the newspapers had to invent better stories than the truth—a little nip isn't news, but horrible mutilation is. And I'm supposed to be the one with the words inside me!

I have become very famous. This morning people stopped us in the street and told him not to threaten me or have me shot. Dog owners sent bones through the post. There were cartoons in the *Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph*. A dachshund called Lottie telephoned to propose marriage. He wrote back to say I was too young. People we did not know made jokes. The Man got bored with the jokes very quickly—particularly "Has he killed a goose today?" and "Still catching your supper, is he?" I loved them. We met the police officer in the street and he said he was sure we would hear no more about the dead goose. He was wrong.

April 12, 1996

I am getting letters from all over the country. Some are from humans pretending to be dogs and some are from humans admitting to be humans. The letters which are signed by dogs all say that I was right and the goose was wrong. The letters which are signed by humans all tell the Man that he must be kind to me and not have me shot.

The Man is going to reply to everyone. He has written one letter for the dogs and another for the humans and has spent all afternoon trying to decide who should get which letter. As soon as he has posted the first batch, he realized he had made a terrible mistake. Lulu is a House of Commons secretary not a Pekinese. I think Countess Beatrice de Villiers of Compton Basset is probably a pedigree German shepherd dog and not an English aristocrat.

April 14, 1996

A solicitor has written to us about the Dangerous Dogs Act. The letter says that one day a policeman will come round and say, "Buster is a pit bull terrier type." He will then take me away and shoot me. The solicitor sent a picture of a pit bull terrier which looks nothing like me but the Man keeps holding it up and making me stand still so that he can write down all the differences to tell the policeman when he comes round with his gun.

He has also measured me, because pit bull terriers are twenty inches from the ground to the shoulder. I am only nineteen. He keeps asking if I am likely to grow. I hope this does not mean he will try to stunt my growth by cutting down on biscuits.

He says, "If the worst comes to the worst, we will go and live in Ireland to escape from the police."

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