

MY FAMILY AND OTHER ANIMALS

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DODO

One unforgettable morning Dodo waddled into our lives.

Dodo was known as a Dandy Dinmont. They look like long, fat, hair-covered balloons, with minute bow legs, enormous and protuberant eyes, and flopping ears.

Strangely enough it was entirely due to Mother that this curious misshapen breed of dog joined our household.

We soon discovered that Dodo had an extremely limited intelligence. There was only room for one idea at a time in her skull, and once it was there Dodo would retain it grimly in spite of all opposition.

She decided quite early in her career that Mother belonged to her, but she was not over-possessive at first until one afternoon Mother went off to town to do some shopping and left Dodo behind.

Convinced that she would never see Mother again, Dodo went into mourning and waddled, howling sorrowfully, round the house, occasionally being so overcome with grief that her weak hind-leg would come out of joint.

She greeted Mother's return with incredulous joy, but made up her mind that from that moment she would not let Mother out of her sight, for fear she escaped again.

So she attached herself to Mother with the tenacity of a limpet, never moving more than a couple of feet away at the most.

If Mother sat down, Dodo would lie at her feet; if Mother had to get up and cross the room for a book or a cigarette, Dodo would accompany her, and then they would return together and sit down again, Dodo giving a deep sigh of satisfaction at the thought that once more she had foiled Mother's attempts at escape.

She even insisted in being present when Mother had a bath, sitting dolefully by the tub and staring at Mother with embarrassing intensity. Any attempts to leave her outside the bathroom door resulted in Dodo howling madly and hurling herself at the door-panels, which invariably resulted in her hip slipping out of its socket.

She seemed to be under the impression that it was not safe to let Mother go alone into the bathroom, even if she stood guard over the door. There was always the possibility, she seemed to think, that Mother might give her the

slip by crawling down the plughole.

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At first Dodo was regarded with tolerant scorn by the other dogs, Roger, Widdle, and Puke; they did not think much of her, for she was too fat and too low slung to walk far, and if they made any attempts to play with her it seemed to bring on an attack of persecution mania, and Dodo would gallop back to the house, howling for protection.

Taken all round they were inclined to consider her a boring and useless addition to the household, until they discovered that she had one superlative and overwhelmingly delightful characteristic; she came into season with monotonous regularity.

Dodo herself displayed an innocence about the facts of life that was rather touching. She seemed not only puzzled but positively scared at her sudden bursts of popularity, when her admirers arrived in such numbers that Mother had to go about armed with a massive stick.

It was owing to this Victorian innocence that Dodo fell an easy victim to the lure of Puke's magnificent ginger eyebrows, and so met her fate when Mother inadvertently locked them in the drawing-room together while she supervised the making of tea.

The sudden and unexpected arrival of the English padre and his wife, ushering them into the room in which the happy couple were disporting themselves, and the subsequent efforts to maintain a normal conversation, left Mother feeling limp, and with a raging headache.

To everyone's surprise (including Dodo's) a puppy was born of this union, a strange, mewling blob of a creature with its mother's figure and its father's unusual liver-and-white markings.

To suddenly become a mother like that, Dodo found, was very demoralising, and she almost had a nervous breakdown, for she was torn between the desire to stay in one spot with her puppy and the urge to keep as close to Mother as possible.

We were, however, unaware of this psychological turmoil.

Eventually Dodo decided to compromise, so she followed Mother around and carried the puppy in her mouth.

She had spent a whole morning doing this before we discovered what she was up to; the unfortunate baby hung from her mouth by its head, its body swinging to and fro as Dodo waddled along at Mother's heels.

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Scolding and pleading having no effect, Mother was forced to confine herself to the bedroom with Dodo and her puppy, and we carried their meals up on a tray.

Even this was not altogether successful, for if Mother moved out of the chair, Dodo, ever alert, would seize her puppy and sit there regarding Mother with starting eyes, ready to give chase if necessary.

“If this goes on much longer that puppy’ll grow into a giraffe,” observed Leslie.

“I know, poor little thing,” said Mother; “but what can I do? She picks it up if she sees me lighting a cigarette.”

“Simplest thing would be to drown it,” said Larry. “It’s going to grow into the most horrifying animal, anyway. Look at its parents.”

“No, indeed you won’t drown it!” exclaimed Mother indignantly.

“Don’t be horrible,” said Margo; “the poor little thing.”

“Well I think it’s a perfectly ridiculous situation, allowing yourself to be chained to a chair by a dog.”

“It’s my dog, and if I want to sit there I shall,” said Mother firmly.

“But for how long? This might go on for months.”

“I shall think of something,” said Mother with dignity.

The solution to the problem that Mother eventually thought of was simple.

She hired the maid’s youngest daughter to carry the puppy for Dodo.

This arrangement seemed to satisfy Dodo very well, and once more Mother was able to move about the house.

She pattered from room to room like some Eastern potentate, Dodo pattering at her heels, and young Sophia bringing up the end of the line, tongue protruding and eyes squinting with the effort, bearing in her arms a large cushion on which reposed Dodo’s strange offspring.

When Mother was going to be in one spot for any length of time, Sophia would place the cushion reverently on the ground and Dodo would surge on to it and sigh deeply.

As soon as Mother was ready to go to another part of the house, Dodo would get off her cushion, shake herself, and take up her position in the cavalcade, while Sophia lifted the cushion aloft as though it carried a crown. Mother would peer over her spectacles to make sure the column was ready, giving a little nod, and they would wind their way off to the next

job.

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Every evening Mother would go for a walk with the dogs, and the family would derive much amusement from watching her progress down the hill. Roger, as senior dog, would lead the procession, followed by Widdle and Puke.

Then came Mother, wearing an enormous straw hat, which made her look like an animated mushroom, clutching in one hand a large trowel with which to dig any interesting wild plants she found.

Dodo would waddle behind, eyes protruding and tongue flapping, and Sophia would bring up the rear, pacing along solemnly, carrying the imperial puppy on its cushion.

Mother's Circus, Larry called it, and would irritate her by bellowing out of the window:

“Oi! Lady, wot time does the big top go up, eh?”

He purchased a bottle of hair restorer for her so that, as he explained, she could conduct experiments on Sophia and try to turn her into a bearded lady.

“That's wot your show needs, lady,” he assured her in a hoarse voice – “a bit of clarse, see? Nothing like a bearded lady for bringin' a bit of clarse to a show.”

But in spite of all this Mother continued to lead her strange caravan off into the olive-groves at five o'clock every evening.