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Stories of My Dogs

Leo Tolstoy

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1888

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Evidently he felt the impulse to bite the hand, but tried to refrain. I did not like to let him have my hand.

1 Sekatch is a two-year-old wild boar, with sharp, straight tusks. AUTHOR'S NOTE.

Then he began to lick my boot and the table leg, and then to bite the boot or the table leg.

This lasted two days, and on the third day he disappeared, and no one ever saw him or heard of him again.

It was impossible for him to have been stolen, and he could not have run away from me.

Now this happened to be about six weeks after the wolf had bitten him. It must have been that the wolf was quite rabid. Bulka also became rabid and went off. He was afflicted with what hunters call stetchka the first stage of madness. It is said that madness is first shown by spasms in the throat. Rabid animals desire to drink, but are unable, because water makes the spasms more violent. Then they get beside themselves with pain and thirst, and begin to bite.

Probably these spasms were just beginning with Bulka, when he showed such a disposition to lick everything, and then to bite my boot and the table leg.

I traveled over the whole region and made inquiries about Bulka, but I could learn nothing about where he had gone or how he died.

If he had run mad and bitten any one as mad dogs usually do, I should have heard from him. But probably he went out somewhere into the thick woods, and died there alone.

Huntsmen declare that when an intelligent dog is attacked by madness, he runs off into the field or woods, and there finds the herb which he needs, rolls over in the dew, and cures himself.

Evidently Bulka did not get well. He never returned, and he disappeared forever.

roared with laughter. The convict with the hook turned the little dog over, and when he saw that he was dead, he pulled back his crook and began to look about for other victims.

At this moment Bulka leaped headlong at the convict, just as he had at the bear. I remembered that he was without a collar, and I cried, " Back, Bulka," and I shouted to the convicts not to kill my dog.

But the convict saw Bulka, guffawed, and skillfully speared at him with his hook, and caught him under the thigh.

Bulka tried to break away, but the convict pulled him toward him, and shouted to the other, " Kill him ! "

The other was already swinging his club, and Bulka would have been surely killed, but he struggled, the skin on his haunch gave way, and, putting his tail between his legs, and with a frightful wound in his thigh, he dashed at full speed through the gate, into the house, and hid under my bed.

What saved him was the fact that the skin on the place where the hook seized him tore out entirely.

Chapter 8 : The End Of Bulka And Milton

Bulka and Milton met their death about the same time. The old Cossack did not understand how to treat Milton. Instead of taking him with him only when he went after birds, he tried to make a boar-hunter of him.

That same autumn a sekatch l boar gored him. No one knew how to sew up the wound, and Milton died.

Bulka also did not live long after his rescue from the convicts. Soon after his rescue from the convicts, he began to mope and to lick everything that came in his way. He would lick my hand, but not as in former days when he meant to caress me. He licked long, and energetically thrust out his tongue, and then he began to seize things with his teeth.

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One morning I came home from the waters and sat drinking my coffee in the latticed garden. Bulka began to scratch himself behind the ears and to rattle his collar. This noise disturbed the bees, and I removed the collar from Bulka's neck.

After a little while I heard in the direction of the city on the mountain a strange and terrible uproar. Dogs were barking, yelping, and howling, men were yelling, and this tumult came down from the mountain and seemed to come nearer and nearer to our suburb.

Bulka had ceased scratching himself, and had laid his broad head between his white fore paws, and with his white teeth exposed and his tongue lolling out, as his habit was, was lying peaceably beside me. When he heard the uproar, he seemed to understand what it was all about; he pricked up his ears, showed his teeth, jumped up, and began to growl.

The tumult came nearer. It seemed as if all the dogs from the whole city were yelping, whining, and barking. I went out to the gate to look, and my landlady joined me there.

I asked :

"What is that?"

She replied :

" Prisoners from the jail coming to kill dogs. Many dogs are running loose, and the city authorities have ordered all dogs in the city to be killed."

"What ! would they kill Bulka if they saw him ? "

" No ; they are ordered to kill only those without collars."

Just as I was speaking, the prisoners were already on their way toward our yard.

In front marched soldiers, followed by four convicts in chains. Two of the convicts had long iron hooks in their hands, and the other two had clubs. When they came in front of our gate, one of the prisoners with a hook caught a cur of low degree, dragged him into the middle of the street, and the other prisoner began to maul him with his club. The whelp yelped horribly, and the convicts shouted something and

Milton to the old Cossack hunter, but Bulka I took with me to Pyetigorsk.

Pyetigorsk, or Five Mountain, is so called because it is built on Mount Besh-Tau. Besh in the Tartar language means five ; and Tau, mountain.

From this mountain flows a sulfur hot spring. The water boils like a kettle, and over the spot where the waters spring from the mountain steam always rises, just as it does from a samovar.

The whole region where the city is built is very charming. The hot springs flow down from the mountains ; at their feet flows the little river Podkumok. The hill- sides are clothed with forests ; in all directions are fields, and on the horizon rise the mighty mountains of the Caucasus. The snow on these mountains never melts, and they are always as white as sugar.

One mighty mountain is Elbrus, like a white sugar- loaf ; and it can be seen from every point when the weather is clear.

People come to these hot springs for medical treatment, and over the springs summer-houses and canopies are built, and gardens and paths are laid out all around. In the morning the band plays, and the people drink the water, or take the baths, and promenade.

The city itself stands on the mountain, and below the city is the suburb.

I lodged in a little house in this suburb. The house stood in a yard,⁴ and there was a little garden in front of the windows, and in the garden were arranged my landlord's bees, not in hollow tree-trunks as in Russia, but in round basket-hives. The bees there were so peaceable that always in the forenoon Bulka and I used to sit out in the garden, among the hives. Bulka used to run among the hives, and wonder at the bees, and smell, and listen to their buzzing; but he moved among them so carefully that the bees did not interfere with him and did not touch him.

⁴ Dvor.

Chapter 1 : Bulka

I had a bulldog, and his name was Bulka. He was perfectly black, except for the paws of his fore legs, which were white. All bulldogs have the lower jaw longer than the upper, and the upper teeth set into the lower ; but in the case of Bulka the lower jaw was pushed so far forward that the finger could be inserted between the upper and lower teeth.

Bulka had a broad face and big, black, brilliant eyes. And his teeth and white tusks were always uncovered. He was like a negro.

Bulka had a gentle disposition and he would not bite ; but he was very powerful and tenacious. Whenever he took hold of anything, he set his teeth together and hung on like a rag, and it was impossible to make him let go ; he was like a pair of pincers.

One time he was set on a bear, and he seized the bear by the ear, and hung on like a bloodsucker. The bear pounded him with his paws, hugged him, shook him from side to side, but he could not get rid of him ; then he stood on his head in his attempts to crush him, but Bulka hung on until they could dash cold water over him.

I took him when he was a puppy, and reared him myself. When I went to the Caucasus, I did not care to take him with me, and I went away noiselessly, and gave orders to keep him chained up.

At the first post-station I was just going to start off with a fresh team, when suddenly I saw something black and bright dashing along the road.

It was Bulka in his brass collar. He flew with all his might toward the station. He leaped up on me, licked my hand, and then stretched himself out in the shadow of the telyega. His tongue lolled out at full length. He kept drawing it back, swallowing the spittle, and then thrusting it out again. He was all panting ; he could not get his breath; his sides actually labored.

He twisted from side to side, and pounded the ground with his tail.

I learned afterwards that, when he found I had gone, he broke his chain, and jumped out of the window, and dashed over the road after my trail, and had thus run twenty versts in the heat of the day.

Chapter 2 : Bulka and the Wild Boar

One time in the Caucasus we went boar hunting, and Bulka ran to go with me. As soon as the boar-hounds got to work, Bulka dashed off in the direction of their music and disappeared in the woods.

This was in the month of November ; at that time the wild boars and pigs are usually very fat. In the forests of the Caucasus, frequented by wild boars, grow all manner of fruits, wild grapes, cones, apples, pears, black-berries, acorns, and rose-apples. And when all these fruits get ripe, and the frost loosens them, the wild swine feed on them and fatten.

At this time of the year the wild boar becomes so fat that he cannot run far when pursued by the dogs. When they have chased him for two hours, he strikes into a thicket and comes to bay there.

Then the hunters run to the place where he is at bay and shoot him. By the barking of the dogs one can tell whether the boar has taken to cover or is still running. If he is running, then the dogs bark with a yelp, as if some one were beating them ; but if he has taken to cover, then they bay with a long howl, as if at a man.

In this expedition I had been running a long time through the forest, but without once coming across the track of a boar. At last I heard the protracted howl and whine of the hounds, and I turned my steps in that direction.

wolf had snapped at him and made off. The wound was small, so that we had no apprehension in regard to it.

We returned to the khata, sat down, and talked over what had happened. I was vexed enough that my musket had missed fire, and I could not help thinking that, if it had gone off, the wolf would have fallen on the spot. My friend was surprised that a wolf had ventured to make its way into the yard.

An old Cossack declared that there was nothing wonderful about it ; that it was not a wolf, but a witch, and that she had cast a spell over my gun !

Thus we sat and talked.

Suddenly the dogs sprang up, and we saw in the middle of the street, right in front of us, the very same wolf ; but this time he made off so swiftly at the sound of our voices that the dogs could not overtake him.

The old Cossack after this was entirely convinced that it was no wolf, but a witch ; but it occurred to me whether it was not a mad wolf, because I had never heard or known of a wolf returning among men after once he had been chased.

At all events, I scattered gunpowder over Bulka's wound and set it on fire. The powder blazed up and cauterized the sore place.

I cauterized the wound with powder so as to consume the mad virus, in case it had not yet had time to reach the blood.

In case of the spittle being poisonous and reaching the blood, I knew that it would spread all over his body, and then there would be no means of curing him.

Chapter 7 : What Happened To Bulka At Pyetigorsk

From the stanitsa, I did not return directly to Russia, but stopped at Pyetigorsk, and there I spent two months. I gave

”There ’s a wolf throttling a young pig.”

I ran into my khata, seized my loaded musket, and hastened out into the street. All were standing at the gates of the yard where the young pig was squealing, and they shouted to me, ” Here ! here ! ”

Milton came leaping after me, evidently thinking that as I had my gun I was going hunting; and Bulka pricked up his short ears and bounded from side to side, as if inquiring what it was that he should grip.

As I was running toward the wattled hedge, I saw a wild animal coming directly for me from the other side of the yard.

It was the wolf.

He was running toward the hedge, and gave a leap at it. I retreated before him and got my musket ready.

As soon as the wolf leaped down from the hedge on my side, I leveled the gun at him, almost touching him, and pulled the trigger; but the gun only gave a ”chik” and missed fire.

The wolf did not stop, but darted down the street. Milton and Bulka set out in pursuit. Milton was near the wolf, but evidently did not dare to seize him ; while Bulka, though he put forth all the strength of his short legs, could not catch up with him.

We ran as fast as we could after the wolf, but wolf and dogs were now out of sight.

But we soon heard near the ditch at the corner of the stanitsa a barking and whining, and we could make out through the moonlit mist that something was kicking up a dust, and that the dogs had tackled the wolf.

When we reached the ditch, the wolf was gone, and both the dogs returned to us with tails erect and excited faces. Bulka growled and rubbed his head against me ; he evidently wanted to tell me about it, but was not able.

We examined the dogs and discovered that there was a small bite on Bulka’s head. He had probably overtaken the wolf in front of the ditch, but had not dared to tackle him, and the

I was already near the boar. I could hear a crashing in the thicket. This was made by the boar, pursued by the dogs. But I could tell by their barking that they had not yet brought him to bay, but were only chasing around him.

Suddenly I heard something rushing behind me, and looking around, I saw Bulka. He had evidently lost track of the boar-hounds in the forest, and had become confused ; but now he had heard their baying, and also, like myself, was in full tilt in their direction.

He was running across a clearing through the tall grass, and all I could see of him was his black head, and his tongue lolling out between his white teeth.

I called him, but he did not look around ; he dashed by me, and was lost to sight in the thicket. I hurried after him, but the farther I went, the denser became the underbrush. The branches knocked off my hat and whipped my face ; the thorns of the briars clutched my coat. By this time I was very near the barking dogs, but I could not see anything.

Suddenly I heard the dogs barking louder ; there was a tremendous crash, and the boar, which was trying to break his way through, began to squeal. And this made me think that now Bulka had reached the scene and was attacking him.

I put forth all my strength, and made my way through the underbrush to the spot.

Here, in the very thickest of the woods, I caught a glimpse of a spotted boar-hound. He was barking and howling without stirring from one spot. Three paces from him I saw something black struggling.

When I came nearer I perceived that it was the boar, and I heard Bulka whining piteously. The boar was grunting and charging the hound, which, with his tail between his legs, was backing away from him. I had a fair shot at the side and the head of the boar. I aimed at his side and fired ; I could see that my shot took effect. The boar uttered a squeal, and turning from me dashed into the thicket. The dogs ran bark- ing and

yelping on his trail. I broke my way through the thicket after them.

Suddenly I heard and saw something under my very feet. It was Bulka. He was lying on his side and whining. Under him was a pool of blood. I said to myself, "My dog is ruined;" but now I had something else to attend to, and I rushed on.

Soon I saw the boar. The dogs were attacking him from behind, and he was snapping first to one side, then to the other. When the boar saw me, he made a dash at me. I fired for the second time, with the gun almost touching him, so that his bristles were singed. The boar gave one last grunt, stumbled, and fell with all his weight on the ground.

When I reached him, he was already dead; only here and there his body twitched, or purred up a little.

But the dogs, with bristling hair, were tearing at his belly and his legs, and others were licking the blood from where he was wounded.

That reminded me of Bulka, and I hastened back to find him. He crawled to meet me, and groaned. I went to him, knelt down, and examined his wound. His belly was torn open, and a whole mass of his bowels protruded and lay upon the dry leaves.

When my comrades joined me, we replaced Bulka's intestines, and sewed up his belly. While we were sewing up his belly and puncturing the skin, he kept licking my hand.

They fastened the boar to a horse's tail, so as to bring it from the woods, and we put Bulka on a horse's back, and thus we brought him home. Bulka was an invalid for six weeks, but he got well at last.

Chapter 3 : Pheasants

In the Caucasus woodcock are called fazamii, or pheasants. They are so abundant that they are cheaper than domestic fowl.

But he would not give it up. He began in all haste to scratch up a hole with his paws, and then with his paws he pushed the turtle into the hole and covered it up with earth.

Turtles live both on land and in the water, like adders and frogs. They produce their young from eggs, and they lay the eggs in the ground; they do not sit on them, however, but the eggs themselves hatch out like fishes' spawn and become turtles.

Turtles are often small not larger than a saucer; and then, again, they are big, reaching a length of seven feet and a weight of seven hundred and twenty pounds. The great turtles inhabit the sea.

One single female turtle in the spring will lay hundreds of eggs.

The shell of the turtle is its ribs. In men and other animals the ribs are each separate, but in the case of the turtle the ribs form the shell. It is also a peculiarity that in all animals the ribs are underneath the flesh, but in the case of the turtle, the ribs are outside, and the flesh is underneath them.

Chapter 6 : Bulka and the Wolf

At the time when I was about to leave the Caucasus, war was still in progress, and it was hazardous traveling by night without an escort.

I was anxious to start as early as possible in the morning, and therefore I did not go to bed at all.

A friend of mine came to keep me company, and we spent the whole evening and night sitting in front of my khata, or hut, on the street of the stanitsa, or Cossack outpost.

It was a misty, moonlight night, and so light that one could see to read, though the moon itself was invisible.

At midnight we suddenly heard a little pig squealing in a yard on the other side of the street. One of us cried :

Chapter 5 : The Turtle

One time I went out hunting with Milton. Just as we reached the forest he began to get a scent. He stretched out his tail, pricked up his ears, and began to sniff.

I got my musket ready and started after him. I supposed that he was on the track of a partridge, or a pheasant, or a hare. But Milton did not turn off into the woods, but into a field. I followed him and looked ahead.

Suddenly I caught sight of what he was after. In front of him a little turtle was making its way it was of the size of a hat. Its bald, dark gray head and long neck were thrust out like a piston. The turtle was moving along by the aid of its bare feet, and its back was wholly covered by its shell.

As soon as it saw the dog, it drew in its legs and head and flattened itself down into the grass, so that only its shell was visible.

Milton grabbed it and tried to bite it ; but he could not set his teeth through it, because the turtle has over its belly the same sort of crust as over its back, with mere openings in front, on the side, and at the back for putting out its head, legs, and tail.

I rescued the turtle from Milton, and examined how its back was marked, and how its shell was constructed, and how it managed to hide itself away. When you hold one in your hands and look under the shell, then, only, can you see something within, black and living.

I laid the turtle down on the grass and went on, but Milton was loathe to leave it ; he seized it in his teeth and followed me.

Suddenly Milton whined and dropped it. The turtle in his mouth had extended a claw and scratched his lips. He was so indignant against it on account of this that he began to bark, and again picked it up and trotted after me.

I told him to drop it again, but Milton would not heed me. Then I took the turtle from him and threw it away.

Pheasants are hunted with the kobuilka} with the podsada, or by means of the dog.

This is the method of hunting with the kobuilka¹ You take canvas and stretch it over a frame ; in the middle of the frame you put a joist, and make a hole in the canvas. This canvas-covered frame is called a kobuilka. With this kobuilka and a gun you go out into the forest just after sunrise. You carry the kobuilka in front of you, and through the hole you keep a lookout for pheasants. The pheasants in the early morning go out in search of food. Sometimes you come across a whole family ; sometimes the hen with the chicks ; sometimes the cock with his hen ; sometimes several cocks together.

The pheasants see no man, and they are not afraid of the canvas, and they let any one approach very near. Then the hunter sets down his kobuilka, puts the muzzle of his musket out through the hole, and shoots at his leisure.

The following is the method of hunting with the podsada: You let loose in the woods a little common house-dog, and follow after him. When the dog starts up a pheasant, he chases it. The pheasant flies into a tree, and then the whelp begins to yelp. The huntsman goes in the direction of the barking, and shoots the pheasant in the tree.

This mode of hunting would be easy if the pheasant would fly into an isolated tree, or would sit on an exposed branch so as to be in full sight. But the pheasants always choose a tree in the densest part of the thicket, and when they see the huntsman they hide behind the branches.

It is not only hard to make your way through the thicket to the tree where the pheasant is perched, but it is hard, also, to get sight of him. When it is only a dog barking under the tree, the pheasant is not afraid ; he sits on the limb, and cocks² his head at him, and flaps his wings. But the instant he sees a man,

¹ Literally, little mare.

² The same pun in the original.

he stretches himself out along the limb, so that only an experienced sportsman would be likely to perceive him, while an inexperienced man would stand underneath and see nothing.

When the Cossacks steal out against pheasants, they always hide their faces behind their caps, and don't look up, because the pheasant is afraid of a man with a musket, but is most of all afraid of his eyes.

Pheasants are hunted by means of the dog³ in this manner: They take a setter and follow him into the woods. The setter catches the scent where early in the morning the pheasants have been out feeding, and he begins to follow the trail. No matter how many times the pheasants have crossed their tracks, a good setter will always pick out the last one, leading from the place where they had been feeding.

The farther the dog gets on the track, the stronger the scent becomes, and thus he reaches the very place where the pheasant has stopped for the day to rest or walk in the grass. When he comes near, his scent tells him that the pheasant is directly in front of him, and he now begins to go more cautiously, so as not to scare the bird, and then he stops to make the leap and seize it. When the dog is very near to the bird, then the pheasant flies up, and the sportsman shoots him.

Chapter 4 : Milton and Bulka

I got a setter for pheasants. This dog's name was Milton. He was tall, thin, gray, with spots, and with long lips and ears, and very strong and intelligent.

He and Bulka never quarreled. Never did dog dare to pick a quarrel with Bulka. All he had to do was once to show his teeth, and other dogs would put their tails between their legs and flee.

One time I was going with Milton out after pheasants. Suddenly Bulka came bounding along to overtake me, after I had reached the woods. I tried to drive him back, but in vain. And it was a long way to go home for the sake of getting rid of him.

I came to the conclusion that he would not interfere, and went on my way ; but as soon as Milton scented a pheasant in the grass and started on the trail, Bulka would dash ahead and begin to hunt about on all sides.

He was anxious to get the pheasant before Milton. If he heard anything in the grass, he would leap and jump about ; but his scent was not keen, and he could not keep to the trail, and so he would watch Milton, and follow wherever Milton went. As soon as Milton found a trail, Bulka would dash ahead.

I tried to call Bulka back, I whipped him ; but I could do nothing with him.

As soon as Milton found a trail, he would dash ahead and spoil all.

I began to think seriously of going home, because I felt that my hunting was spoiled ; but Milton knew better than I did how to throw Bulka off the track. This was the way he did it : As soon as Bulka ran ahead of him, Milton would quit the scent, turn to one side, and pretend that he was hunting for it. Bulka would then run back where Milton was pointing, and Milton, glancing at me, would wag his tail, and again set out on the right track.

Then once more Bulka would dash ahead of Milton, and once more the setter Milton would purposely run ten feet aside from the right trail for the purpose of deceiving Bulka, and then lead me straight on again, so that throughout the whole hunt he kept deceiving Bulka, and did not let him spoil my sport.

³ Iz pod sobaki.