

“When the Man waked up he said,  
‘What is Wild Dog doing here?’

And the Woman said,  
“His name is not Wild Dog any more,  
but the First Friend,  
because he will be our friend  
for always and always and always.””

Rudyard Kipling



# Foreword



Our relationship with our companion animals – especially our dogs – is very important, and, for many, one of the most influential in our lives, which often shapes our appreciation of love, or at least our ability to know affection and commitment to another. But we must accept that a dog has a shorter lifespan than do we, usually just ten to fourteen years, which is only a small part of our lives, meaning that we may have many companion dogs. What is novel in *When man meets dog* is the appreciation that the bond between us and our dogs does not end at the time of their death.

There are many books and popular articles that recount the dog-human relationship, especially from the female perspective. This may not be surprising, as dogs are often viewed as not only members of the family, but juvenile members

– children, that is – and women are the recognized child caretakers and leaders of the family pack. Of course, men have a long-time record as fathers, but this is not often appreciated in connection with the canine family member: the generalization is that a man is more disciplined in function and emotion in the dog-human bond. To be sure, the assertion that a dog is ‘man’s best friend’ is well known, and emphasizes the animal’s role and importance to us, more so than the other way around. As a general rule, in scholarly and popular literature, the male point of view is less explored.

Dr Blazina observes that a man with a dog can be alone with others: that is, be alone without being lonely. Such solitude encourages the man to explore thoughts and feelings not possible whilst with other people, who

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## All good things are wild and free

“The soul is like a wild animal – tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient, and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods, and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of the tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek.”

– Parker Palmer, *The Broken Open-Heart*

There is a special place not far from my house where Sadie and I walk. If our timing is right, we see the ‘Monarch of the Glen,’ my nickname for a magical creature who inhabits the forest. Part of his distinct appearance is a more-than-twelve-point rack of antlers standing three feet from his head. He has a triangular beard, and his eyes are ancient and regal.

The first time I saw this deer, I could not help but nod my head in admiration, and each time I subsequently encounter the Monarch, it stirs another reaction – wonder. I am drawn out of my normal experience of time and space: my heart rate slows, and my body relaxes. What, initially, was an experience of watching another creature changes; I now feel like I have joined with him, both of us small parts of something bigger. Sadie also seems strangely calm,

and does not attempt to cross over into the tree line where he always stands.

I have never seen the Monarch out in the open. A thin veil of shrubs or a low-lying tree marks the entrance to his realm, one that, for a few moments, is approached. We stand there taking each other in, and when it is time to part ways, I pay my respects. As I walk away, I realize I am affected by this experience. It lingers. I feel gentle, wild, and alive.

On another day at dusk, Sadie and I come across one of the Monarch’s great-grandsons. Sadie picks up the scent, and we round the corner of a trail that opens into a small clearing. There is a proud buck with does of various ages in his family. He seems somewhat surprised to see us. Stillness gives way to movement, and the buck stomps and snorts. The cold air

# Postscript



*Dear Kelsey,*

*I wish you were still here. It has been more than ten years since the last time I saw you. I got the idea to write this letter from a client I saw today. She wrote to her child, who she lost a number of years ago. I think of you as my child, friend, and family. Sometimes, when the memories we shared come back to me, it's like all those roles are wrapped into one. I think that is part of the reason why it has been so hard to lose you. I never really realized how many ways you touched my life till you were gone.*

*Sadie is all grown up now; in fact, you may not recognize her. She is an old girl with grey streaks, and her teeth have gotten nubby. She likes chewing on treats and bones, just like you did. We walk together every morning and evening ... I sold the old house we all lived in; it was too sad to keep living there after you were gone. The new house backs up to the woods, and we see all kinds of animals: deer, wild turkeys, and your favorite, squirrels.*

*I remember you each year on the day you passed. I go to the park where I spread your ashes. Sometimes as I sit there, I think I can feel you nearby, just like old times. I wonder what you are doing now. Have you moved on to an afterlife or another existence? I sometimes hope that I will bump into you one day on the street or at a dog park, or maybe you will appear as a stray dog who mysteriously shows up at my front door. In either case, I know I would recognize you, no matter what.*

## The continuing bond

*Wherever you are, I hope you are happy and well. You deserve it; you brought so much to my life; made it possible for other connections to be made.*

*I finally got married. My wife is very nice, but she likes the house cleaner than we use to keep it. Remember how the ants would show up from time to time? I also have a little boy. I think you would like him, too. He plays and smiles, and is so full of life. His hair is blonde, like yours. One day I will tell him about you and how you helped me, kept me company, and stayed by my side: all the things a best friend does. I don't think I will ever stop missing you until I see you again.*

Chris

