

# Teddy

## by Rob Chilson

Off in the woods, foxes barked. Teddy listened alertly, but didn't bark back; they were far away. Suddenly he sat up from where he lay under the walnut tree, looking around the big, moon-lit yard.

"Woof?" he said.

The foxes answered, but that wasn't it. It had been one of Their noises, a metallic sound.

Then a Person came out of the barn, stopped and looked about.

"Woof? Woof?" It was more of a question than a demand; he was not angry, nor frightened. He knew better than to show anger toward a Person.

"Hey, heyyy, Teddy, don't wake the family."

Embarrassed, Teddy dropped his head and tail, his ears going down too. He wagged his tail so hard his whole body bent and straightened. It was the voice of one of his family. For him, the image of this one was quietness and affectionate tones and gentle touch, The Quiet One, whose love for Teddy was more openly demonstrated than anyone else's.

Then they were close enough for him to smell the other and Teddy checked in puzzlement. This was the Old One -- no, it had to be The Quiet One -- but he smelled like an older Person. Not the Old One -- that one smelled of age and ill-health and smoke. Not the Other Old One -- that one smelled of age and the tobacco he constantly spat. This smelled like The Quiet One, but grown up. Teddy whined in puzzlement. That very evening The Quiet One had said good night to him, and had smelled and sounded young.

"Quiet, Teddy. God, is it good to see you again, after all these years! Worth every cent I paid-- Heyyy, Teddy, let's go for a walk--"

He understood "walk" and jumped with a yelp he instantly regretted, but The Quiet One didn't reprove him again.

"Come, boy! Come, boy!"

The Quiet One led him out of the yard, down the hill toward the creek and the berry patch. Teddy danced along with him, returning to him for frequent pats or ruffles of his long floppy ears, attentions that were never denied. For a long time they prowled among the wild blackberries, The Quiet One picking and eating berries, sharing some with Teddy. Because one of his family gave them to him, Teddy ate a few.

The Quiet One sat on the bank of the creek in the moonlight and talked to him for a long time, petting him and hugging him. Teddy panted with delight, his heart melting with pure joy. He licked The Quiet One's face when the latter lay back and looked up at the sky.

Finally they went back to the yard, where the Old Possum was mumbling around under the corncrib, but Teddy knew The Quiet One didn't care about any opossum. Long ago They had taught him not to bark at the small animals who shared the yard. The Quiet One walked very quietly now. He went over to the tractor and patted it affectionately, speaking to it much as he had to Teddy. Then the car, then he peered

in the window of the henhouse, and finally back to the barn.

It was now very late and Teddy was a bit sleepy, but still game.

"What a picture you make, Teddy, with that black fur and white markings -- lace shirt front, pantalettes, and that half-and-half tail. Stand there -- no, just stand there -- stay -- stay--" The incomprehensible murmurs went on, punctuated by pressure of the hands as Teddy tried to follow him when he backed away.

Then he made a very bright flash of light, but Teddy was only momentarily startled. People did things like that, and it was no brighter than lightning. There were faint mechanical noises, and The Quiet One stooped toward him. Teddy ran forward through the blotches in his vision, laughing with his tongue out, to be hugged.

"Goodbye, Teddy, goodbye . . ."

Teddy whined at that, that was what they said when they went away and left him all alone. Whining mournfully, he followed The Quiet One into the barn. Teddy glimpsed a big Iron Thing there, not a car or tractor or anything he recognized. His hackles went up slightly; it smelled strange. It hadn't been there earlier. Teddy approached it cautiously to sniff, and the Quiet One patted his head one last time.

"Don't pee on the time machine," he said affectionately.

Then it was gone, and Teddy was looking at the wall.

He whined in puzzlement. He stood slowly wagging his tail, whined again in disappointment that The Quiet One was gone. However, he'd had doors closed in his face before -- a mysterious thing, a piece of solid wall materializing from nowhere. But much that They did was mysterious. A little dog could only love and not bother his head with wonder.

He went back to his place under the walnut and dozed; the foxes were silent now.

Faint light, squirrels, and birds heralded day. The squirrels leaped from the big soft maples onto the roof, ran thumpety-thumpety across it, sprang to the pear tree and down to the ground, then scampered across to the walnuts, avoiding the tree Teddy slept under in summer. He watched them with enjoyment, but had learned long ago that his short legs put them beyond his reach.

Presently They began to move about in the house, and Teddy went to the kitchen door, where he ambushed Them as They emerged one at a time, some merely to look around, pausing to pet him and speak, others to stroll down to the outhouse, also not neglecting to pet and speak to him. To Teddy's puzzlement, The Quiet One smelled today as he had yesterday -- last night he had become used to The Quiet One's new, grown-up smell. Big Cat came from nowhere, as was his wont, grandly ignored Teddy's offered nose, and was presently admitted to the house.

He smelled Their food, then he heard Them eating, and the Girl brought food for him -- dry, as he liked it, not mushy. He crunched and gulped with great enjoyment, then went back and peered eagerly through the screen door. Big Cat was daintily chewing his food too, and gave him an expressionless glance.

Then They came out and moved purposefully about the yard, and to his delight began to work about the tractor, with much talk. Presently it began to bark like a dog, but very very fast. Teddy ran up in front of it, put his nose within inches of the inside of the wheel, and barked as loud as he could. The Big One, oldest of the three boys, cried, "Teddy! Quiet!"

He paid no attention. The tractor began to roll toward him. Teddy walked backward, still making the

metal ring with his own barking. Suddenly it lurched and came at him faster. He backed hastily out, then reared up, put his front feet on top of the oncoming wheel. Walking frontward with his front feet and backward with his back feet, he stayed ahead of the tractor, still barking.

"Teddy!" yelled The Big One.

The tractor checked momentarily and Teddy took warning, was away before it came on even faster. It was too fast to get close to now -- Teddy had been run over a couple of times by the light machine. He kept back but never stopped barking, pausing occasionally to laugh with tongue out at the younger boys in the trailer, The Quiet One and The Noisy One. The Old One and the Other Old One were in it also. The Noisy One suddenly jumped off it and ran at him as if to tackle him. Teddy barked at him and ran around in a circle, barking again at the tractor.

As he did so, he looked suddenly about for his Mother. It was she who'd taught him the joy of barking at the tractor, and running around it. But then he remembered -- she was gone, he had not seen her in a long long time.

But the tractor was heading off for the woods, They were laughing and calling and yelling at each other. Teddy ran up to the tractor again, barking as loudly as he could, as loud as its own rapidfire barking.

"TEDDY!"

Then he was startled by a thunderous bang. He leaped aside and paused; Teddy was gunshy. Then he smelled black powder smoke, realized that The Big One was trying to scare him again with a firecracker. The tractor barked louder and faster, and so did he, racing around and laughing at The Big One.

"Hear us a quarter've a mile off," grumbled the Other Old One, spitting tobacco.

It was the beginning of another perfect day in a little black and white dog's life.

Teddy dozed more than normal that day, and that night, too, he was dozing when the light faded and the foxes began to bark. He awoke quickly enough then and was yelling back at the foxes when he heard a noise in the barn and remembered, with hope, that The Quiet One had played with him the night before. And sure enough, to his delight, it was The Quiet One who came out of the barn and ran to meet him, laughing quietly and grabbing his ears, jerking his head about gently and talking joyously to him. Again, to Teddy's brief puzzlement, he smelled grown up, but Teddy soon got used to it again.

They went for a long ramble in the moonlight, and again The Quiet One spent much time sitting and talking, holding Teddy and patting him and ruffling his fur affectionately.

And in the nights that followed, while the moon waned and faded, then waxed again, The Quiet One came out of the barn almost every night. But every morning he came out of the house, and by day he was young, while he was old by night. Teddy soon accepted this; who can fathom Their ways? Sometimes they went for long rambles about the Place at night, sometimes hanging about the fringes of the yard, sometimes walking up to the Road. But he never went into the house, or even near to it. And every day The Quiet One did the things he had always done by day. One night The Quiet One climbed into the tree where the boards were, and lugged Teddy up with much grunting and laughter, and they sat looking down on the yard and the house and barn and crib and henhouse all silver and ink in the moonlight. Then Teddy had a fleeting sense of how strange these nights were. But The Quiet One spoke

and he lost the feeling.

And so the summer wore on, the moon waning again and waxing, and now the days were shorter, the

land dryer, the air rich and ripe and heavy with fruitful odors, the nights cool and dewy. The Young Ones began to leave the Place early in the mornings, in the Big Iron Thing, and return in the afternoon; the old rhythm, five days gone and two days home. The Quiet One came out of the barn less frequently at night, then still less frequently. Now at nights he seemed melancholy, and spent much time hugging Teddy. Then there was a chill in the air, finally one morning a frost, and at last he stopped coming out at night at all.

Some time after that Teddy ceased to expect him. He made a vague connection between the frosty nights and The Quiet One's nightly absence. But still he was there by day, always young. Teddy missed the nightly rambles and the attention, and sometimes felt lonely, as when he had lost his mother. But the mornings always came.

The nights got colder, and then it was winter, and that was good, too. Armored in his long thick fur and his fat, Teddy did not suffer from the cold. Every day They were out and about, and always They called to him and patted him and fed him. Finally came a softening, a wetness of the air and soil, wind and rain: spring.

Then summer, and Teddy pricked up his ears at every odd sound in the night, expecting, then hoping, then gradually disappointed. All that summer, Teddy hoped, but The Quiet One did not come to play with him in the night.

The winter came again, and the summer, and the winters and the summers came and went, each season with its special joys. Never a summer came but that Teddy hoped The Quiet One would come out of the barn again in the night. He never forgot.

Meantime, The Quiet One was growing up in the days, his smell changing, his voice deepening. Teddy himself changed. Now he ran where once he had scampered, walked where once he had run.

One night of early chill he stood beneath the denuded walnut trees, feeling the chill of the ground beneath his pads, feeling the crispness of the air in his nostrils, hearing it in the distinctness of sounds, comfortably aware that it could not reach him through his fur and fat. But it reached him in another way, in the stiffness of his joints, the deliberation of his movements. As he sat propped on his front paws listening alertly to the barking of foxes that would in earlier years have sent him yelling defiance back at them, his mind wandered. Soon, he knew, it would be winter. It would be cold. And for the first time he could remember, he wished it different. He had always loved winter, too, but now he dreaded it. He wished summer would come again. He wished it was summer and that The Quiet One would come to him in the night.

They would go off to the berry patch, enjoying each other's company, enjoying the coolness after the heat, and he would laugh and leap and run and sometimes forget, and bark. And The Quiet One would pat him and ruffle his ears, and it would be as wonderful as it had been, that wonderful summer, the most wonderful summer he had ever known.

From these musings, he passed into a memory of his Mother. She had

gone away a long time ago, when he was barely full grown. He was already bigger than she, before that. It was she who taught him to chase cars, but the family made him stop. He did not know what had happened to her. His confused memories included mourning and a mound of fresh earth, and the scent of death, but these things had so little to do with his memory of Mother, her bark, her joy, rushing crazily around the yard, each chasing the other, that there was no real connection in his mind.

To Teddy, Mother was still there, somewhere, in some confused way in the world as well as in his mind, if he could only find the way to her.

Teddy sighed, and the sigh became a mournful whine. If only he knew the way! He would go running (as when a pup he had rushed crazily around the house and found his mother again), run out into the woods and come panting back into the yard as it had been then, the trees smaller and the house different, come back perhaps from behind the barn, and find Mother awaiting him there, her joyous bark, scampering puppy-like to meet him, tumbling in play, just as it had always been in his memory . . .

Teddy sighed again and lay down, putting his nose on his paws. Off in the woods, the foxes barked as they had done when he was young.

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