

Poor Elsa

Suddenly it was dark, cold, and alien, where seconds before it had been home. Dark, it is true, but warm and cushioned and familiar.

The puppy opened her mouth, and made a noise barely audible to the outside world. She was unhappy and momentarily lost and she seemed to have come a long, long way in a very short time.

The baby squeak she had made, not heard at all by the man who was watching her, was so loud to her that it roared and reverberated inside her tiny head, and was her very first protest against this sudden and cruel precipitation into a cold world. Then a wet, warm blanket thing passed over her several times, and the adjustment to another <sup>world</sup> world began. A pleasant feeling of being cared for came over the pup.

Elsa, the old bitch, was officially past breeding, and the pup was her last, and an only one. The elderly couple who owned her regarded the event with scant enthusiasm, but were prepared to let the pup live, mainly because any other course would involve trouble and perhaps a little guilt.

There were now no children in the family, they had grown up and left home, and the couple had been expecting Elsa to be making for a canine heaven soon. She was old. Her unexpected maternity was unwelcome, the couple just could not be bothered.

Elsa had been the children's dog, a German shepherd who had lived for and guarded the children, and would have died for them.

During those happy days, her puppies were welcomed and loved by the children, and Elsa glowed with pride. When the pups had to go to make lives of their own, the children cried, but by this time Elsa was quite ready to let them go, and thus to have the children's

affection exclusively for herself, and to fully resume her guarding duties which she loved.

Elsa hardly remembered the handsome father of this, her last pup, but by great good luck he too was a German Shepherd, from over the road, a bold fellow of impeccable breeding, to whom an eight-foot gate was as nothing. He was a marvellous swan song for Elsa, the last lover she would have, but now she was only concerned with the fruit of the union.

The man who stood ready to assist with the birth, if necessary, was the vet whom Elsa knew. The couple knew that they could never face the children if anything happened to Elsa through neglect. When the pup was safely delivered and was starting to eke out her existence by tapping her mother's meagre milk supply, the vet sought out the couple, and cheerily announced "another Elsa". So Elsa she became, mainly because it would be boring thinking up another name, and she'd be sold soon anyway.

Young Elsa was a nervous pup, she hated to be far from her mother, who loved her, and poured into her care all the loneliness she had felt since the children left home.

Six weeks passed, and the couple advertised the pup for sale. It was very near Christmas, so there should be no trouble in selling her.

Several people came to see her, one lot decided that she would grow too large for their small house. Two people almost bought her, then decided to look for a dog instead - less trouble.

The people who finally bought her were a young couple who wanted a present for their little girl.

They had never had a dog before, asked no questions, apparently not in the least worried that before long the pup would be very large and no doubt bouncing too.

They were enchanted with the seven week old pup, and never thought that as she grew and became active and affectionately bouncy, she might well knock the little girl down.

This, in fact, did happen, and the couple in their ignorance thought that they had bought a vicious dog, and decided to pass her on, whilst their little girl still lived.

The most interested of the enquirers after Elsa was a farmer who saw in her the makings of a yard dog. She would be well fed, but chained all day to guard and warn off intruders.

Poor Mr Johns, no sooner had he established Elsa in what he hoped was her programme for living than he met with an unfortunate hunting accident, and was brought home on a hurdle.

Mrs Johns liked dogs, but the farm would have to be sold, she would not be able to manage it alone. Thinking of herself settled in a neat semi, she just could not see Elsa as part of her new life - a poodle maybe, but not Elsa, definitely not.

The coalman made his routine visit to the farm more out of courtesy, in the circumstances, and to express sympathy.

Obviously with a sale pending, coal would not be needed. The coalman, however, had a sharp eye for the unconsidered trifle, for anything lying about or going cheap. A pound or two on such a sale paid for his beer.

Hearing that the pup, now called Susie, was to be given away, he magnanimously offered to "take 'er off yer 'ands, mum".

So Elsa, now Susie, was unceremoniously bundled into the cab of the coal lorry to be offered around, at a price.

The coalman thought that Susie was a soppy name for a German Shepherd, so he bought a copy of "The Dog Handler" and decided that Axel was a good name - a selling name if ever there was one. It hinted at breeding, nobility, yes, a fine name, it put

a quid or two on the price.

It sat badly on a poor bewildered pup who no longer knew who she was or where she belonged, if indeed she did belong to anybody. The Coalman was kind to her in his rough way, but hated her when she whimpered and cowered in her misery. A dog called Axel should be fearless and proud - the sooner he sold this misery the better. At No. 34 Anaby Street lived Mrs Anita Scott, a mouse-like lady who feared most things and people, but most of all her husband, David. They had no children, and David Scott was often away. Mrs Scott was lonely and very ripe for the introduction of a dog to the household. The coalman could be persuasive, and in no time Mrs Scott's need for affection and company reached out in great sympathy to this puppy, so leggy and forlorn.

She looked and she loved, and yearned to spend herself in making the pup happy and unafraid.

The coalman <sup>knew</sup> ~~knew~~ nothing of the pup's background, beyond her sojourn with the farmer, but it needed little imagination to see that she lacked confidence, and sadly - she cringed. The blows received from the couple who had thought her vicious had left their mark.

Money changed hands and once again Elsa/Susie/Axel was stepping timidly into the unknown.

Mrs Scott, who always did the wrong thing herself, had great sympathy with the pup and enveloped her with love. All the little misdeameanors which lack of house-training created were made light of, and Mrs Scott started to think of a new name. She didn't like Axel, it reminded her of David and his interminable talk of motor cars.

Heavens - David! He would soon be back from his business trip, what ~~w~~ould he say about the pup! Nervousness bedewed Mrs Scott's

brow.

She tried to remember anything that David had said about dogs. Did he like them? Reluctantly but with great honesty, Mrs Scott had to admit to herself that David only liked David. He didn't even like her very much, he found her useful in limited ways, but feeble. Yes, that is what he had called her. She suddenly felt a blaze of anger - he may be right - but now she had something alive of her very own, and in its defence, she would grow. David could be very unkind, and one day Daisy - yes, that was the name : it suited her - one day Daisy would protect her.

Armed with a new resolve and an unaccustomed bravery, she marshalled all her resources to meet her husband's wrath. She had~~not~~ asked his permission, and this would annoy him.

Thus David's return was waited with some anxiety: which would it be? - Indifference, or sharp reprimands followed by heavy silences. She would be creeping about trying to be invisible.

Daisy was put in the picture, and implored to be a good girl, and not to make messes and puddles whilst David was there.

Daisy's knowledge of the English language was not even basic. She did recognise a slightly disappointed tone in Mrs Scott's voice when she said "Oh <sup>e</sup>dar, you are a naughty Daisy, you've done it again" but she also recognised the "It's all right" tone which went with "Never mind, you are only a baby, mummie will clear it up". This meant that nature had won again, and it always would, because Mrs Scott would just wait for Daisy to stop being a baby, she would issue no commands, attempt no training, always fearful of seeming harsh.

David's car scrunched to a standstill in the drive, the door was flung open, a case thrown in. A quick absent-minded peck which was David's usual loving embrace, and there he stood, five foot

six, and dour of countenance.

The journey had been trying - damn fools who shouldn't be on the road, messing about and getting in his way. Shouldn't be allowed. Driving ~~Test~~ was a farce, passing morons every day.

Really, Anita might have smartened herself up a bit to greet him. The house smelt odd - not like its usual bland sort of smell, a bit strong, like a kennel. Must be one of Anita's feeble friends, visiting with a stinking dog. He must forbid it.

What was Anita twittering about now - something about a dog, a puppy of her own. This was unbelievable, a stinking dog, in his house, and bought with his money, and without his permission, by his wey-faced wife. This was the end, unbelievable.

Mrs Scott seldom pleaded, she just pulled her invisible cloak over her head and shut up. Today was different, her Daisy, joy of her heart, her friend, was in danger of eviction. She put her case as never before, bringing before him her loneliness, artfully interspersing the need of more of her husband's company - which she realised thankfully could not be forthcoming. David was just slightly mollified, and had to admit to himself that her life was of course utterly meaningless without him.

Well, he was prepared to be magnanimous, and to give the brute a day or so.

As long as he didn't smell it, or hear it doing anything louder than padding gently from room to room, he'd give in. If it barked or stank it was out!

Mrs Scott spent most of her day watching Daisy, ready to cover for her mistakes or to silence her barks with soft caresses. It worked for the first day, and Daisy had been rendered socially acceptable by selective washing and perfuming.

The second day was a disaster. The Scotts lived some way from

the shops, and as David always had the car, when he did come home he always took his wife to the supermarket. He enjoyed this, as he could supervise the purchases, and make sure that his money was not wasted.

Always in a fluster when going out with David, Mrs Scott quite forgot to let Daisy out, forgot to feed her, and neglected to remove the remains of their breakfast from the working surface in the kitchen.

David was always in a hurry, and brooked no delay - he shouted and stormed if kept waiting.

The door slammed, Daisy was alone. The blanket of love had gone, and gone with a disagreeable man.

Daisy howled, Daisy barked, Daisy's internals played her up, and puddles and messes were widely spread.

The food which was easy to reach smelt nice, but having removed it from the surface and spread it around a bit, Daisy didn't want it, and subsided, in a welter of misery and loneliness. When the front door finally opened to admit Daisy's <sup>e</sup><sub>^</sub>dar mum, accompanied by the rival, misery evaporated, and Daisy was ready for joy and cuddles. The house looked as though vandals had been in, and it was not sweet smelling either.

"What the hell" David was purple in the face and outraged beyond coherent speech "Bloody stinking dog". "Clean this outrageous mess up instantly whilst I take this thing to be shot". "Obscene sewer of an animal, I'll not have it in the house another instant". "No, I have a better idea, clean my house, and you take it and get it put down, I'd boot it all the way there" "Just don't bring it back if you want to keep it, you go with it, please yourself".

Mrs Scott's stomach was jelly, and she was reduced to internal shaking. Gone the blazing anger, the brave front. her nerves were

in ribbons.

She crept out, Daisy slinking beside her, dimly conscious that she, Daisy, was in some way responsible for the black atmosphere in the house.

However, she and mum had left the angry man, so things would be all right.

Mrs Scott sat heavily on a stone wall, her arm round Daisy. What could she do? Putting down was out of the question.

How did one hear of a good home on the spur of the moment?

Then suddenly came the thought that our policemen are wonderful. She knew what she had to do. She would tie Daisy up outside the Police Station, and a kind policeman would see to it that she got a good home.

She was crying bitterly as she tied up Daisy, her collar had no name, and address, so she would not be brought back. "Darling Daisy" she wept "forgive me, I just can't fight David, he's so unfeeling and unkind".

So Daisy was passed on once more, this time her head was wet with a woman's tears, but she was abandoned none the less.

Hours passed, and she shivered and whimpered miserably, she had never felt so alone. Someone had loved her, but had gone, was there no end to desertion, cold and utter misery?

It was quite late at night when a police constable realised that Daisy was not waiting for anyone, but was a gift for them!

She was taken in, and registered in the book "Alsation bitch, about 8 months old - no identification - tied up and abandoned".

The police treated her well, fed her, and to a man felt sorry that such a nice animal should be without a happy secure home.

The usual waiting period, just in case she was claimed, then two alternatives. A 'phone call to a lady who would take in such dogs



if she could, and find a home, or a quick dispatch, and Daisy's troubles would be at an end.

The lady agreed to take her.

How very much we have to thank ~~her~~ <sup>the lady</sup> for that kind action, because we needed a large dog just at that time - to act as a deterrent, but to be a friend too.

We have given her yet another name - Heidi - and this is for keeps - we want her to forget her past, a new name, a new home, and we really love her.

She gets along well with the other animals, and its great to see the dawning of affection for us in her lovely brown eyes. She is daily gaining in confidence, Xshe goes to a training class.

She is part of the family; she has arrived. She is home.