

A Lonely Man

Tony glanced down lovingly at the lead in his hand, slowly drawing the smooth leather between the tips of his fingers. The sense of loss was overwhelming as he sat in silence, the only sound being the thumping of heavy rain upon the car roof. He could still smell him, his scent hung in the air, caught by the coarse nylon thread of the seats. Staring remotely through the windscreen he followed the water as it swam down the glass, his vision blurring as hot tears threatened to spill.

The house was cold and empty, even the roaring fire as it hissed and spat failed to banish the icy feel that engulfed the room. Opening a bottle of whiskey Tony threw back the half full tumbler, he felt no better.

“If only the decision had been out of my hands,” he said to the emptiness, pouring himself another drink. “Maybe he would have got better. It wasn’t fair to ask me to decide! What right do I have to take his life?” The tears ran unchecked now, the Scotch had loosened his defenses and every time he closed his eyes an image of the dog appeared in the darkness.

A little unsteadily he rose to his feet, taking tentative steps towards the stairs. He had not eaten and the drink quickly gone to his head.

Suddenly out of the corner of his eye he saw a movement, sobering swiftly he snapped his head around; nothing.

“I could have sworn....” he left the sentence unfinished, the soft-spoken words echoing strangely.

He stood rooted to the spot, unable to move, his muscles tense and alert. The touch was soft and warm against his leg, comforting. It seemed natural as he bent to stroke the fleecy golden fur of the retrievers head. But his open palm simply pierced the empty space at his feet, his mind beginning to question its own sanity.

The clock was striking midnight as the last drop drained from the bottle, drunkenly Tony let the empty bottle fall to the floor. He could barely stand as he attempted to reach the kitchen, hunger gripping his stomach. Without thinking he drew a tin of dog food from the cupboard and span it on the opener, allowing the familiar smell to drift to his nostrils. Scooping half the contents into the bowl on the floor he made to place the tin in the fridge. He stopped, suddenly realizing what he was doing.

“Am I going mad?!” He shouted, throwing the tin across the room scattering the jellied meat upon the tiled floor.

Morning sunshine was pouring through the open window as he entered the kitchen. His memory of the previous evening was vague, two things he remembered well; the warm touch upon his leg and a half glimpsed figure out the corner of his eye.

Looking at the mess strewn across the floor he remembered the dog food and dropped his eyes to the bowl. It was empty.



© Phil Churchill 1991

www.philchurchill.co.uk