The Dog

Arnold Bennett

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THIS is a scandalous story. It scandalised the best people in Bursley; some of them would wish it forgotten. But since I have begun to tell it I may as well finish. Moreover, like most tales whispered behind fans and across clubtables, it carries a high and valuable moral. The moral — I will let you have it at once — is that those who love in glass houses should pull down the blinds.

I

He had got his collar on safely; it bore his name — Ellis Carter. Strange name for a dog, perhaps; and perhaps it was even more strange that his collar should be white. But such dogs are not common dogs. He tied his necktie exquisitely; caressed his hair again with two brushes; curved his young moustache, and then assumed his waistcoat and his coat; the trousers had naturally preceded the collar. He beheld the suit in the glass, and saw that it was good. And it was not built in London, either. There are tailors in Bursley. And in particular there is the dog's tailor. Ask the dog's tailor, as the dog once did, whether he can really do as well as London, and he will smile on you with gentle pity; he will not stoop to utter the obvious Yes. He may casually inform you that, if he is not in London himself, the explanation is that he has reasons for preferring Bursley. He is the social equal of all his clients. He belongs to the dog's club. He knows, and everybody knows, that he is a first−class tailor with a first−class connection, and no dog would dare to condescend to him. He is a great creative artist; the dogs who wear his clothes may be said to interpret his creations. Now, Ellis was a great interpretative artist, and the tailor recognised the fact. When the tailor met Ellis on Duck Bank greatly wearing a new suit, the scene was impressive. It was as though Elgar had stopped to hear Paderewski play "Pomp and Circumstance" on the piano.

Ellis descended from his bedroom into the hall, took his straw hat, chose a stick, and went out into the portico of the new large house on the Hawkins, near Oldcastle. In the neighbourhood of the Five Towns no road is more august, more correct, more detached, more umbrageous, than the Hawkins. M.P.'s live there. It is the link between the aristocratic and antique aloofness of Oldcastle and the solid commercial prosperity of the Five Towns. Ellis adorned the portico. Young (a bare twenty−two), fair, handsome, smiling, graceful, well−built, perfectly groomed, he was an admirable and a characteristic specimen of the race of dogs which, with the modern growth of luxury and the Luxurious Spirit, has become so marked a phenomenon in the social development of the once barbarous Five Towns.

When old Jack Carter (reputed to be the best turner that Bursley ever produced); started a little potbank near St. Peter's Church in 1861 —; he was then forty, and had saved two hundred pound —; she little dreamt that the supreme and final result after forty years would be the dog. But so it was. Old Jack Carter had a son John Carter, who married at twenty−five and lived at first on twenty−five shillings a week, and enthusiastically continued the erection of the fortune which old Jack had begun. At thirty−three, after old Jack's death, John became a Town Councillor. At thirty−six he became Mayor and the father of Ellis, and the recipient of a silver cradle. Ellis was his wife's maiden name. At forty−two he built the finest earthenware manufactory in Bursley, down by the canal−side at Shawport. At fifty−two he had been everything that a man can be in the Five Towns —; from County, Councillor to President of the Society for the Prosecution of Felons. Then Ellis left school and came to the works to carry on the tradition, and his father suddenly discovered him. The truth was that John Carter had been so laudably busy with the affairs of his town and county that he had nearly forgotten his family. Ellis, in the process of achieving doghood, soon taught his father a thing or two. And John learnt. John could manage a public−meeting, but he could not manage Ellis. Besides, there was plenty of money; and Ellis was so ingratiating, and had curly hair that somehow won sympathy. And, after all, Ellis was not such a duffer as all that at the works. John knew other people's sons who were worse. And Ellis could keep order in the paintresses' "shops" as order had never been kept there before.

John sometimes wondered what old Jack would have said about Ellis and his friends, those handsome dogs, those fine dandies, who taught to the Five Towns the virtue of grace and of style and of dash, who went up to London —; some of them even went to Paris —; and brought back civilisation to the Five Towns, who removed from the Five Towns the reproach of being uncouth and behind the times. Was the outcome of two generations of unremitting toil merely Ellis? (Ellis had several pretty sisters, but they did not count.) John could only guess at what old Jack's attitude might have been towards Ellis —; Ellis, who had his shirts made to measure. He knew exactly what was Ellis's attitude towards the ideals of old Jack, old Jack the class−leader, who wore clogs till he was thirty, and dined in his shirtsleeves at one o'clock to the end of his life.

Ellis quitted the portico, ran down the winding garden−path, and jumped neatly and fearlessly on to an electric tramcar as it passed at the rate of fifteen miles an hour. The car was going to Hanbridge, and it was crowded with

the joy of life; Ellis had to stand on the step. This was the Saturday before the first Monday in August, and therefore the formal opening of Knype Wakes, the most carnivalesque of all the carnivals which enliven the four seasons in the Five Towns. It is still called Knype Wakes, be cause once Knype overshadowed Hanbridge in importance; but its headquarters are now quite properly at Hanbridge, the hub, the centre, the Paris of the Five Towns —; Hanbridge, the county borough of sixty odd thousand inhabitants. It is the festival of the masses that old Jack sprang from, and every genteel person who can leaves the Five Towns for the seaside at the end of July. Nevertheless, the district is never more crammed than at Knype Wakes. And, of course, genteel persons, whom circumstances have forced to remain in the Five Towns, sally out in the evening to "do" the Wakes in a spirit of tolerant condescension. Ellis was in this case. His parents and sisters were at Llandudno, and he had been left in charge of the works and of the new house. He was always free; he could always pity the bondage of his sisters; but now he was more free than ever —; he was absolutely free. Imagine the delicious feeling that surged in his heart as he prepared to plunge himself doggishly into the wild ocean of the Wakes. By the way, in that heart was the image of a girl.

II

He stepped off the car on the outskirts of Hanbridge, and strolled gently and spectacularly into the joyous town. The streets became more and more crowded and noisy as he approached the market−place, and in Crown Square tramcars from the four quarters of the earth discharged tramloads of humanity at the rate of two a minute, and then glided off again empty in search of more humanity. The lower portion of Crown Square was devoted to tramlines; in the upper portion the Wakes began, and spread into the market−place, and thence by many tentacles into all manner of streets.

No Wakes is better than Knype Wakes; that is to say, no Wakes is more ear−splitting, more terrific, more dizzying, or more impassable. When you go to Knype Wakes you get stuck in the midst of an enormous crowd, and you see roundabouts, swings, switchbacks, myrioramas, atrocity booths, quack dentists, shooting−galleries, cocoanut−shies, and bazaars, all around you. Every establishment is jewelled, gilded, and electrically lighted; every establishment has an orchestra, most often played by steam and conducted by a stoker; every establishment has a steam−whistle, which shrieks at the beginning and at the end of each round or performance. You stand fixed in the multitude listening to a thousand orchestras and whistles, with the roar of machinery and the merry din of car−bells, and the popping of rifles for a background of noise. Your eyes are charmed by the whirling of a million lights and the mad whirling of millions of beautiful girls and happy youths under the lights. For the roundabouts rule the scene; the roundabouts take the money. The supreme desire of the revellers is to describe circles, either on horseback or in yachts, either simple circles or complex circles, either up and down or straight along, but always circles. And it is as though inventors had sat up at nights puzzling their brains how best to make revellers seasick while keeping them equidistant from a steam−orchestra. . . . Then the crowd solidly lurches, and you find yourself up against a dentist, or a firm of wrestlers, or a roundabout, or an ice−cream refectory, and you take what comes. You have begun to "do" the Wakes. The splendid insanity seizes you. The lights, the colours, the explosions, the shrieks, the feathered hats, the pretty fares as they fly past, the gilding, the statuary, the August night, and the mingling of a thousand melodies in a counterpoint beyond the dreams of Wagner —; these things have stirred the sap of life in you, have shown you how fine it is to be alive, and, careless and free, have caught up your spirit into a heaven from which you scornfully survey the year of daily toil between one Wakes and another as the eagle scornfully surveys the potato−field. Your nostrils dilate —; nay, matters reach such a pass that, even if you are genteel, you forget to condescend.

III

After Ellis had had the correct drink in the private bar up the passage at the Turk's Head, and after he had plunged into the crowd and got lost in it, and submitted good−humouredly to the frequent ordeal of the penny squirt as administered by adorable creatures in bright skirts, he found himself cast up by the human ocean on the macadam shore near a shooting−gallery. This was no ordinary shooting−gallery. It was one of Jenkins's affairs (Jenkins of Manchester), and on either side of it Jenkins's Ven etian gondolas and Jenkins's Mexican mustangs were whizzing round two of Jenkins's orchestras at twopence a time, and taking thirty−two pounds an hour. This gallery was very different from the old galleries, in which you leaned against a brass bar and shot up a kind of a drain. This gallery was a large and brilliant room, with the front−wall taken out. It was hung with mirrors and cretonnes, it was richly, carpeted, and, of course, it was lighted by electricity. Carved and gilded tables bore a whole armoury of weapons. You shot at tobacco−pipes, twisting and stationary, at balls poised on jets of water, and at proper targets. In the corners of the saloon, near the open, were large crimson plush lounges, on which you lounged after the fatigue of shooting.

A pink−clad girl, young and radiant, had the concern in charge.

She was speeding a party of bankrupt shooters, when she caught sight of Ellis. Ellis answered her smile, and strolled up to the booth with a countenance that might have meant anything. You can never tell what a dog is thinking.

"'Ello!" said the girl prettily (or, rather, she shouted prettily, having to compete with the two orchestras). "You here again?"

The truth was that Ellis had been there on the previous night, when the Wakes was only half−opened, and he had come again to−night expressly in order to see her; but he would not have admitted, even to himself, that he had come expressly in order to see her; in his mind it was just a chance that he might see her. She was a jolly girl. (We are gradually approaching the scandalous part.)

"What a jolly frock!" he said, when he had shot five celluloid balls in succession off a jet of water.

Smiling, she mechanically took a ball out of the basket and let it roll down the conduit to the fountain.

"Do you think so?" she replied, smoothing the fluffy muslin apron with her small hands, black from contact with the guns. "That one I wore last night was my second−best. I only wear this on Saturdays and Mondays."

He nodded like a connoisseur. The sixth ball had sprung up to the top of the jet. He removed it with the certainty of a King's Prize winner, and she complimented him.

"Ah!" he said, "you should have seen me before I took to smoking and drinking!"

She laughed freely. She was always showing her fine teeth. And she had such a frank, jolly countenance, not exactly pretty —; better than pretty. She was a little short and a little plump, and she wore a necklace round her neck, a ring on her dainty, dirty finger, and a watch−bracelet on her wrist.

"Why!" she exclaimed. "How old are you?"

"How old are *you?*" he retorted.

Dogs do not give things away like that.

"I'm nineteen," she said submissively. "At least, I shall be come Martinmas."

And she yawned.

"Well," he said, "a little girl like you ought to be in bed."

"Sunday to−morrow," she observed.

"Aren't you glad you're English?" he remarked. "If you were in Paris you'd have to work Sundays too."

"Not me!" she said. "Who told you that? Have you been to Paris?"

"No," he admitted cautiously; "but a friend of mine has, and he told me. He came back only last week, and he says they keep open Sundays, and all night sometimes. Sunday is the great day over there."

"Well," said the girl kindly, "don't you believe it. The police wouldn't allow it. I know what the police are."

More shooters entered the saloon. Ellis had finished his dozen; he sank into a lounge, and elegantly lighted a cigarette, and watched her serve the other marksmen. She was decidedly charming, and so jolly —; with him. He noticed with satisfaction that with the other marksmen she showed a certain high reserve.

They did not stay long, and when they were gone she came across to the lounge and gazed at him provocatively.

"Dashed if she hasn't taken a fancy to me!"

The thought ran through him like lightning.

"Well?" she said.

"What do you do with yourself Sundays?" he asked her.

"Oh, sleep."

"All day?"

"All morning."

"What do you do in the afternoon?"

"Oh, nothing."

She laughed gaily.

"Come out with me, eh?"

"To−morrow? Oh, I should LOVE TO!" she cried.

Her voice expanded into large capitals because by a singular chance both the neighbouring orchestras stopped momentarily together, and thus gave her shout a fair field. The effect was startling. It startled Ellis. He had not for an instant expected that she would consent. Never, dog though he was, had he armed a girl out on any afternoon, to say nothing of Sunday afternoon, and Knype's Wakes Sunday at that! He had talked about girls at the club. He understood the theory. But the practice —;—;

The foundation of England's greatness is that Englishmen hate to look fools. The fear of being taken for a ninny will spur an Englishman to the most surprising deeds of courage. Ellis said "Good!" with apparent enthusiasm, and arranged to be waiting for her at half−past two at the Turk's Head. Then he left the saloon and struck out anew into the ocean. He wanted to think it over.

Once, painful to relate, he had thoughts of failing to keep the appointment. However, she was so jolly and frank. And what a fancy she must have taken to him! No, he would see it through.

IV

If anybody had prophesied to Ellis that he would be driving out a Wakes girl in a dog−cart that Sunday afternoon he would have laughed at the prophet; but so it occurred. He arrived at the Turk's Head at two twenty−five. She was there before him, dressed all in blue, except the white shoes and stockings, weighing herself on the machine in the yard. She showed her teeth, told him she weighed nine stone one, and abruptly asked him if he could drive. He said he could. She clapped her hands and sprang off the machine. Her father had bought a new mare the day before, and it was in the Turk's Head stable, and the yardman said it wanted exercise, and there was a dogcart and harness idling about, and, in short, Ellis should drive her to Sneyd Park, which she had long desired to see.

Ellis wished to ask questions, but the moment did not seem auspicious.

In a few minutes the new mare, a high and somewhat frisky bay, with big shoulders, was in the shafts of a high, green dogcart. When asked if he could drive, Ellis ought to have answered: "That depends —; on the horse." Many men can tool a fifteen−year−old screw down a country lane who would hesitate to get up behind a five−year−old animal (in need of exercise) for a spin down Broad Street, Hanbridge, on Knype Wakes Sunday. Ellis could drive; he could just drive. His father had always steadfastly refused to keep horses, but the fathers of other dogs were more progressive, and Ellis had had opportunities. He knew how to take the reins, and get up, and give the office; indeed, he had read a hand−book on the subject. So he took the reins and got up, and the Wakes girl got up.

He chirruped. The mare merely backed.

"Give 'er 'er mouth," said the yardman disgustedly.

"Oh!" said Ellis, and slackened the reins, and the mare pawed forward.

Then he had to turn her in the yard, and get her and the dogcart down the passage. He doubted whether he should do it, for the passage seemed a size too small. However, he did it, or the mare did it, and the entire organism swerved across a portion of the footpath into Broad Street.

For quite a quarter of a mile down Broad Street Ellis blushed, and kept his gaze between the mare's ears. However, the mare went beautifully. You could have driven her with a silken thread, so it seemed. And then the dog, growing accustomed to his prominence up there on the dogcart, began to be a bit doggy. He knew the little thing's age and weight, but, really, when you take a girl out for a Sunday spin you want more information about her than that. He asked her name, and her name was Jerkins —; Ada. She was the great Jenkins's daughter.

("Oh," thought Ellis, "the deuce you are!")

"Father's gone to Manchester for the day, and aunt's looking after me," said Ada.

"Do they know you've come out —; like this?"

"Not much!" She laughed deliciously. "How lovely it is!"

At Knype they drew up before the Five Towns Hotel and descended. The Five Towns Hotel is the greatest hotel in North Staffordshire. It has two hundred rooms. It would not entirely disgrace Northumberland Avenue. In the Five Towns it is august, imposing, and unique. They had a lemonade there, and proceeded. A clock struck; it was a near thing. No more refreshments now until they had passed the three−mile limit!

Yes! Not two hundred yards further on she spied an ice−cream shop in Fleet Road, and Ellis learnt that she adored ice−cream. The mare waited patiently outside in the thronged street.

After that the pilgrimage to Sneyd was punctuated with ice−creams. At the Stag at Sneyd (where, among ninety−and−nine dog−carts, Ellis's dogcart was the brightest green of them all) Ada had another lemonade, and Ellis had something else. They saw the Park, and Ada giggled charmingly her appreciation of its beauty. The conversation throughout consisted chiefly of Ada's teeth. Ellis said he would return by a different route, and he managed to get lost. How anyone driving to Hanbridge from Sneyd could arrive at the mining village of Silverton is a mystery. But Ellis arrived there, and he ultimately came out at Hillport, the aristocratic suburb of Bursley, where he had always lived till the last year. He feared recognition there, and his fear was justified. Some silly ass, a schoolmate, cried, "Go it!" as the machine bowled along, and the mischief was that the mare, startled, went it. She went it down the curving hill, and the vehicle after her, like a kettle tied to a dog's tail.

Ellis winked stoutly at Ada when they reached the bottom, and gave the mare a piece of his mind, to which she objected. As they crossed the railway−bridge a goods−train ran underneath and puffed smoke into the mare's eyes. She set her ears back.

"Would you!" cried Ellis authoritatively, and touched her with the whip (he had forgotten the handbook).

He scarcely touched her, but you never know where you are with any horse. That mare, which had been a mirror of all the virtues all the afternoon, was off like a rocket. She overtook an electric car as if it had been standing still. Ellis sawed her mouth; he might as well have sawed the funnel of a locomotive. He had meant to turn off and traverse Bursley by secluded streets, but he perceived that safety lay solely in letting her go straight ahead up the very steep slope of Oldcastle Street into the middle of the town. It would be an amazing mare that galloped to the top of Oldcastle Street! She galloped nearly to the top, and then Ellis began to get hold of her a bit.

"Don't be afraid," he said masculinely to Ada.

And, conscious of victory, he jerked the mare to the left to avoid an approaching car. . . .

The next instant they were anchored against the roots of a lamp−post. When Ellis saw the upper half of the lamp−post bent down at right angles, and pieces of glass covering the pavement, he could not believe that he and his dogcart had done that, especially as neither the mare, nor the dogcart, nor its freight, was damaged. The machine was merely jammed, and the mare, satisfied, stood quiet, breathing rapidly.

But Ada Jenkins was crying.

And the car stopped a moment to observe. And then a number of chapel−goers on their way to the Sytch Chapel, which the Carter family still faithfully attended, joined the scene; and then a policeman.

Ellis sat like a stuck pig in the dogcart. He knew that speech was demanded of him, but he did not know where to begin.

The worst thing of all was the lamp−post, bent, moveless, unnatural, atrociously comic, accusing him.

The affair was over the town in a minute; the next morning it reached Llandudno. Ellis Carter had been out on the spree with a *Wakes girl* in a dogcart on Sunday afternoon, and had got into such a condition that he had driven into a lamp−post at the top of Oldcastle Street just as people were going into chapel.

The lamp−post remained bent for three days —; a fearful warning to all dogs that doggishness has limits.

If it had not been a dogcart, and such a high, green dogcart; if it had been, say, a brougham, or even a cab! If it had not been Sunday! And, granting Sunday, if it had not been just as people were going into chapel! If he had not chosen that particular lamp−post, visible both from the market−place and St. Luke's Square! If he had only contrived to destroy a less obtrusive lamp−post in some unfrequented street! And if it had not been a Wakes girl —; if the reprobate had only selected for his guilty amours an actress from one of the touring companies, or even a star from the Hanbridge Empire —; yea, or even a local barmaid! But a *Wakes girl!*

Ellis himself saw the enormity of his transgression. He lay awake astounded by his own doggishness.

And yet he had seldom felt less doggy than during that trip. It seemed to him that doggishness was not the glorious thing he had thought. However, he cut a heroic figure at the dog's club. Every admiring face said: "Well, you *have* been going the pace! We always knew you were a hot un, but, really —;—;"

V

On the following Friday evening, when Ellis jumped off the car opposite his home on the Hawkins, he saw in the road, halted, a train of vast and queer−shaped waggons in charge of two traction−engines. They were painted on all sides with the great name of Jenkins. They contained Jenkins's roundabouts and shooting−saloons, on their way to rouse the joy of life in other towns. And he perceived in front of the portico the high, green dogcart and the lamp−post−destroying mare.

He went in. The family had come home that afternoon. Sundry of his sisters greeted him with silent horror on their faces in the hall. In the breakfast−room, which gave off the drawing−room, was his mother in the attitude of an intent listener. She spoke no word.

And Ellis listened, too.

"Yes," a very powerful and raucous voice was saying in the drawing−room, "I reckoned I'd call and tell ye myself, Mister Carter, what I thought on it. My gell, a motherless gell, but brought up respectable; sixth standard at Whalley Range Board School, and her aunt a strict God−fearing woman! And here your son comes along and gets hold of the girl while her aunt's at the special service for Wakes folks in Bethesda Chapel, and runs off with her in my dogcart with one of my hosses, and raises a scandal all o'er the Five Towns. God bless my soul, mister! I tell'n ye I hardly liked to open o' Monday afternoon, I was that ashamed! And I packed Ada off to Manchester. It seems to me that if the upper classes, as they call 'em —; the immoral classes I call 'em —; 'ud look after themselves a bit instead o' looking after other people so much, things might be a bit better, Mister Carter. I dare say you think it's nothing as your son should go about ruining the reputation of any decent, respectable girl as he happens to fancy, Mister Carter; but this is what I say. I say —;—;

Mr. Carter was understood to assert, in his most pacific and pained public−meeting voice, that he regretted, infinitely regretted —;—;

Mrs. Carter, weeping, ran out of the breakfast−room.

And soon afterwards the traction−engines rumbled off, and the high, green dogcart followed them.

Ellis sat spell−bound.

He heard the parlourmaid go into the drawing−room and announce, "Tea is ready, sir!" and then his father's dry cough.

And then the parlourmaid came into the breakfast−room: "Tea is ready, Mr. Ellis!"

Oh, the meal!