

—Country Philosopher—

And she was my friend

by Amos Arthur Holmes

Catherine C. Culpepper was a lady. A very rare, intelligent, sophisticated, lovable, prankish friend. She was, when I was young, my most trusted companion. And the fact that she was a dog did not distract one iota from her magnificence.

When I was six years old, on my birthday, my father informed me that he had gotten me a gift and that the gift was somewhere in the kitchen. I searched everywhere. On top of the counter, in the sink, the closet and the pantry. Finally, almost in tears, I noticed under the table this tiny bundle of fur.

The Lord only knows what kind of dog she was. She never talked about her family and I never brought up the subject. She looked like a cross between a St. Bernard and a Dachshund. Her head was huge, her body long, and her legs short and thick. And her ugliness gave her that exquisite charm one derives from lack of vanity.

I think that all of us have had pets that wouldn't own up to the fact that they were not human beings. Catherine, from the very start, knew that she most certainly wasn't a dog. If I put a plate of dog food in front of her she would sulk for an hour. She preferred whatever we had. If the family had steak, then Catherine expected steak. If we had cottage cheese and peach halves, then Catherine expected the same thing. She would balk just a trifle if we had chop suey. She wasn't particularly fond of chop suey but she ate it with only a small whimper of discontent.

I was a small boy, and she was a small dog, and we knew that life would be much easier for both of us if we formed a friendship. There was never that feeling of master and pet. Simply a relationship of equality that blossomed quickly into love.

I remember the time that Catherine got in a fight with a German Shepherd that lived down the street. The German Shepherd was a very mean, vicious, capable fellow and Catherine soon found out that the male is physically superior to the female.



When I got to her she was bleeding from a terrible gash across her back. I hurriedly picked her up and ran with her in my arms down the street to our family physician. That old doctor didn't bat an eye when I walked in. He just took Catherine into his little room and patched her up. And during her convalescence I stayed with her every second I could manage.

And when I became ill with the flu, Catherine never left by bedroom. She would lay beside the bed with her head on her paws and never take her eyes off me.

By golly, the love we shared.

Life wasn't all that easy for Catherine. I remember the time she came across the cheese in the dining room under the radiator. She dearly loved cheese and would have had no trouble at all if the cheese had not been attached to a mouse trap. WHAM! The first I knew of her dilemma was when she came racing out into the back yard with the mouse trap firmly, painfully, pinched on her nose.

There was the time my Uncle Henry, who was slightly demented, gave Catherine a saucer of brandy. Catherine became intoxicated. She weaved, and staggered, and my father wanted to shoot her because he thought she had hydrophobia.

We were inseparable. When I went down behind the house to a small brook, she always accompanied me. I threw in my fishing line, and if I happened to catch a small fish Catherine would become as excited as I would.

And then, one morning in August, I came downstairs for breakfast. I had been surprised upon awakening that Catherine wasn't beside my bed. I

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walked into the kitchen and the first thing I noticed was my mother and sister sitting at the table. They were crying. My mother put her arms around me, and said, "Honey, Catherine has been struck by a car."

"Is she hurt bad, Mama?" I asked. My anguish was unbearable. "Son...she's...she's...dead."

Poor, tender, young heart. When the first pangs of misery at losing a loved one infiltrates and pains and saddens.

Catherine was lying in the back yard. I went to her and knelt beside that still form. I stroked her fur and whispered, "I love you."

I dug the grave and I buried her. I made a cardboard headstone on

which I printed, Catherine C. Culpepper, August 24th, 1933. I sat in my back yard until the evening shadows had dissolved into night. And I knew...I KNEW...that God had a place for my dog. I believed then, even at that tender age, that Heaven had a garden set aside for pets.

And 45 years later I still believe it. And still remember Catherine.