

The Story of a Soft-Hearted Bullet and a Regal Saluki

Fond Memories of India and Britain Before WWI

My neighbour Richard Cotnam, left these pages in my mailbox last fall because he knew that I had Salukis and that this bit of history would be of great interest to me. Richard is Big Brother to a local boy and he was reading his family history to Scotty and when Scotty heard the word Salukis, he remarked, "You have to show these to Johnny!" I told Scotty and Richard that I would send them to Saluki Sightings so that everyone would enjoy them, too.

When I asked Richard about his family he told me this, "My name is Richard Cotnam and I'm one of seven kids, four boys and three girls. My mother was born in Simla, India and she was

one of three children. Her father, Pierre Cheriote was in the consular service of the French Government and he had a summer guesthouse for people travelling through the area and where there wasn't an embassy, they would stay there and that was my mother's childhood and this lady who wrote this reminiscence would have been an aunt or great-aunt of hers who had those Salukis and who wrote this great bit of history."

To say the least, this reflection of this pre-World War One lady and her experiences with Salukis as well as the tidbits of other stories on these pages are fascinating!

— Johnny Mroz

About June of 1913 I was in Lahore where I'd been asked to play in "Jedbury Junior".

Walking into the Club one evening after a rehearsal I saw Bullet in the distance. It was a shock as I'd no idea he was in Lahore. I had decided to cut him out of my life - and had not found it easy. It was imperative that he should believe I was whole heartedly over the affair - better still if he thought someone else had taken his place.

With me was a quiet senior Subaltern in the Q. Lancer regiment, whom I'd only just met.

We sat down at the first table, and I decided to tell him. I was in a fix, and to ask his help. I explained quickly - (concerned only with my fears and forgetting I was confiding in a stranger).

There was a man who meant the whole world to me, and I'd broken with him definitely. I'd just caught sight of him in the hall and wanted above all things that he should see I was entirely carefree. If he should come across and speak to me would he - Roland Mitchell - mind pretending to be very interested in me?

Roland proved a darling and a tower of strength. He played up well that first evening when Bullet came over and did all he could; later on, explaining that he knew few people in Lahore; so no one would be hurt if the gossips talked. If I cared to be seen about with him he'd be delighted.

The cast of "Jedbury Junior" had a small man's part not filled and I persuaded Roland to accept it.

He called on Uncle Robert, with whom I was staying, and for a month we did everything and went

everywhere together. He taught me to drive his tandem, took me to the races, and we rode together, and danced. I watched him playing Polo, and in fact we made ourselves thoroughly conspicuous.

We ran into Bullet now and again, and from his remarks knew our ruse had succeeded well.

Unfortunately Roland fell in love with me - a contingency I'd not thought of. We'd been such friends, and he'd been so good to me, that I felt a hateful ungrateful beast; but I knew there was no hope when he insisted that in time I'd grow to care as he did.

What a muddle life can be. Here was someone exceptionally nice and charming in every way - tall and good looking too! - well off, and heir to a lovely Elizabethan home in England. I liked him immensely - but I knew I couldn't marry him.

Bullet was ugly, had an awful temper, with not a penny piece and I'd have followed him to the ends of the earth if he'd wanted me.

Roland gave me his beautiful Saluki (Afghan greyhound) "Careless" and I took her back to Simla with me. These dogs were very rare in India in those days, and she created much interest wherever she went. Of all the many dogs I've ever had and loved, I think she was the most wonderful. They are one-man dogs, very clever and faithful, and Careless had been amazingly well trained. She absolutely shadowed me unless told to stay elsewhere.

I'd had her about a year and was playing "Olga" the Lion Queen in "The Dollar Princess" and the powers that be thought Careless would look very effective on the stage accompanying "Olga". She had always come to rehearsals, but lay quietly in the theatre aisle or wherever I put her.

For our entrance, down a long flight of stairs, we had to climb a ladder-like construction in the wings and walk across a narrow plank - but where I could go so could Careless.

The first few nights she behaved superbly; (we played for a fortnight) standing by me quietly; moving away at a word, her eyes always on me. Taking no notice of the lights, laughter, clapping, orchestra etc.

Then one night she disgraced us, but the story soon went round Simla and she became known

more as a heroine than a hysterical actress!

She had come down the stairs in her usual dignified manner, and was standing beside me waving her long silky tail gently from side to side, the golden crest raised on her lovely head. Suddenly she hurried down to the footlights, jumped the orchestra, and leapt up at a man in the Stalls!

It was Roland. He had just arrived on leave, not letting us know as he wanted to give me a surprise. He kept Careless by him till the end of the performance, then she ran to me nuzzling her soft nose into my hand and saying so plainly with her beautiful eyes "I love you both so much".

When Roland returned to his Regiment she seemed to know it couldn't be helped. He had given her to me partly because the heat of the plains didn't agree with her.

At the end of 1914 I took her to England and the poor darling had six months in quarantine before I sent her to Roland's people in Somerset. I was in rooms in London and felt she would be so much happier in the country.

A whole year later I went to visit the Mitchells and wondered if Careless would remember me. Mr Mitchell met me at Crewkerne Station driving a high two-wheeled dog cart.

Inside the lodge gates a long drive led to the house, the last stretch being straight. In the distance a speck appeared and rapidly grew bigger. We pulled up as Careless leapt into the trap. (Mr Mitchell said it was a thing she'd never done before). Her head was on my knee and her eyes fixed on mine as she made the strangest whimpering noises. I couldn't help it - I cried - and was still blowing my nose when Mrs Mitchell welcomed me. Even now as I write I have a lump in my throat.

I stayed a month and had the loveliest time, but the last days were spoilt with the thought of giving the dog up again.

There is an old French song with the following words in it which haunt me every time I say "goodbye" to anyone I love

"Partir, c'est mourir un peu

C'est mourir pour ceux qu'on aime".

I felt the same for Careless and I honestly believe she "died a little" at each of these tragic partings.