

BYRD SPILMAN DEWEY

BRUNO

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Bruno:

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Bruno

CHAPTER I

We do not count the first half-year of our married life, because, during that time we did not live, we boarded.

Then we found we had developed a strong appetite for housekeeping, so we began to look about us for a house.

In the small northern village where we must live, it was not possible to rent anything that suited us; so we decided to take what we could get until we could manage to build what we wanted.

The house we took was one which had originally been built out in the country, but the town had crept around it until it now seemed to be almost in the heart of the village.

While we were furnishing and embellishing this our first home, was, I think, the most entirely happy time of our lives.

Julius often said, "I know now why the birds always sing so joyously when they are building their nests."

We were just beginning to feel settled, when a letter came to Julius from his only sister, who lived in a city. It was not unusual for him to have letters from her, but this particular letter stands by itself.

It had a postscript!

The postscript said: "Would you like a nice dog? The children have had a valuable puppy, seven months old, given to them, and we cannot keep him here, in a flat. He is half setter and half water-spaniel; pure on both sides. We call him 'Bruno.'"

How our dignity increased at the idea of owning live-stock! So far we had only achieved a cat, who had by this time achieved kittens. But a dog! That was something like! It did not take us long to decide and send off an enthusiastic acceptance. Then another letter came, saying that Bruno had started on the journey us-ward.

The next afternoon a colored car-porter walked into Julius's place of business escorting a shaggy brown dog by a chain fastened to his collar. We have never known just what transpired during that eighteen hours' journey; but something notable there certainly was, for Bruno could never endure the sight or presence of a negro from that time as long as he lived. He seemed utterly humiliated and dejected when he was led in.

Julius looked up from his day-book, and exclaimed, —

"Is that you, Bruno? How are you, old fellow?" At the sound of his name, Bruno raised his ears, wrinkled his forehead, and cocked his head on one side inquiringly. Julius stroked and patted him, and Bruno was won.

I was sitting at home busily sewing, when I was startled by a great clatter out on the sidewalk. I looked, and there came Julius leading — puppy, indeed! A dog nearly as big as a calf! I had

expected a baby-dog in a basket!

He was a beauty, – his hair just the color that is called auburn or red, when humans have it. He sniffed me over approvingly, and let me hug his beautiful head.

We took off the chain, and watched him roll and bathe himself in the high grass of the back yard. He had probably never seen such grass before, and he could not express his delight with it.

There was a three-cornered discussion at bedtime about where our new pet was to sleep. Julius and I did the talking, while Bruno sat upright – I called it "standing up before, and sitting down behind," his ears cocked up, looking from one to the other as we spoke, seeming to understand all that was said. It was finally decided to make him a bed on the floor beside ours, so that he would not be lonesome.

Several times in the night we were startled by his cries. He moaned and whined in his sleep, – evidently having bad dreams. Julius would call to him until he was broad awake, then reach down and pat him till his tail began to thump the floor, and he would rise and wind himself up by going round and round on his bed, then drop, to go off again into an uneasy snooze. We did not sleep much. Towards morning we were awakened from a first sound nap, finding ourselves violently crowded and pushed. Julius sprang out of bed and lighted a candle. There was Bruno monopolizing half of our bed.

It was daylight before we could convince him that his bed was on the floor and that he was expected to occupy it.

The next afternoon, I ventured to take Bruno for a walk. I had tied a broad light-blue ribbon in a big bow round his neck, which contrasted beautifully with his auburn curls. I felt very proud of his appearance, and he also eyed me with a look of satisfaction. Alas! "Pride goeth before a fall, and a haughty spirit before destruction."

As we crossed a street that ran at right angles with the one we were gracing, Bruno, looking down its vista, caught sight of what was probably the first flock of hens he had ever seen.

All the setter in him sprang to the fore, and in a flash he was off after them. Without a thought, I followed. Up and down the street we sped, – he after the one speckled hen he had singled out, and I after him, shrieking to him, and making lunges at him with my parasol, as he and the hen rushed by me.

Finally the distracted Biddy, squawking, cackling, and with outspread wings, found the hole under the fence through which the others had escaped and disappeared, leaving us to view the ruins, heated and dishevelled, with smashed parasol, muddy feet, dragged ribbon, and vanished dignity.

After some half-hysterical reproaches from me, which Bruno listened to with drooping ears and tail, we turned, demoralized and dejected, to wend our way homeward, I mentally congratulating myself that the streets were deserted. I shuddered to think of the probable consequences if it had happened after school hours when the small boy was abroad.

So far we had managed to prevent a meeting between Bruno

and Rebecca.

Bruno was to us such an uncertain quantity that we feared the result of their first glimpse of each other. So the box containing Rebecca's kittens had been kept out in the stable, and her food carried out to her to prevent the dreaded meeting. I wearied of the daily forced marches stable-ward, though, and longed to have them within reach. So, one evening after Julius came home from the office, we, in fear and trembling, brought in the box, and mounted guard to watch developments.

Bruno looked curious, sniffed, and then drew nearer. I sat down on the floor to be ready to defend them, while Julius stood behind Bruno.

As soon as he spied the kits, his ears rose and he was all alert. Then gradually he seemed to realize, from our way of proceeding, that they were not fair game. His ears drooped forward, his tail began to wag, and I drew back from the protecting attitude I had instinctively assumed. His tail continued to wag, his ears drooped lower and lower, until presently he was licking the little kits and rooting them over with his nose regardless of their ineffectual clawing and spitting.

At this stage of the game, who should arrive on the scene but Rebecca! She came dashing in, having returned from a hunting excursion to find her nest of babies gone; coming, as she always did when anything went wrong, for our help and comfort. As soon as she saw Bruno, her back went up as if a spring had been touched; she stood at bay, growling and spitting.

He started towards her, but Julius grasped his collar. Then Rebecca caught sight of her kits. She darted to them, sprang into the box, and covered them with her body.

Julius loosened his hold of Bruno, who advanced eagerly.

Rebecca received him with a flash of her paw which left a long deep scratch on his nose. He retreated whining and growling. Julius comforted him, while I took Rebecca in hand. For some time we reasoned and experimented with them, until finally we had the satisfaction of seeing Rebecca let down her bristles and begin to purr while Julius smoothed her head and back with Bruno's paw.

After that they kept the peace fairly well, though Rebecca always boxed his ears when she came in and found him licking and nosing her kittens.

We tried to keep him away from them, but he did love them so. He would watch Rebecca out of one eye as he lay dozing, and as soon as she started on a hunt, he would go tiptoeing to the kitten-box for a frolic.

Soon they grew quite fond of playing with his big curly ears, and forgot to spit and scratch.

CHAPTER II

One morning when Julius got up, he could find only one of his slippers. After a long search the other was found under the edge of the washing-stand, but in a decidedly dilapidated condition.

It had evidently been gnawed.

We gravely discussed the misfortune of having our premises invaded by rats, and when on the following morning one of my overshoes was likewise discovered to be a wreck, matters began to look serious, and Julius hastened to procure a trap.

That night I was awakened from my first doze by a sound of gnawing, and on hastily lighting a candle, Bruno was seen with a conscious, shamefaced expression – just like a big boy who is caught enjoying a nursery-bottle – chewing a shoe!

It was quite a revelation of dog-character to find such a big fellow chewing up things, but we were relieved on the score of rats. Bruno was furnished with an old shoe for his very own on which to exercise his jaws, and we formed the habit of arranging our shoes on the mantelpiece every night before retiring.

We exchanged the trap for some boxes of tacks, which are always "handy to have in the house."

About this time our neighbors, the Crows, became possessed of a large setter dog, by name Leo.

This dog was deficient in morality, and at once developed thieving propensities.

Bruno soon understood that we did not want Leo to come to our house, nor even into the yard; still, he personally formed a dog-friendship for him. While this seemed at the time very strange to us, I have since explained it to my own satisfaction.

I think Leo must have confided to Bruno the fact that he was not well cared for by his owners.

Many people seem to think it is unnecessary to give a dog regular meals. They think he ought to "pick up a living." The Crows seemed to have this idea; so Bruno doubtless felt that Leo was not altogether to blame for being a thief, and after fiercely driving him outside of our gate, he would follow, and they would have romps and races until both were exhausted.

Leo was the only real dog-friend Bruno ever had. All his other friends were either humans or cats.

The crowds of dogs that sometimes go yelping and tearing through the streets were to him objects of the loftiest scorn. From front window or porch he would look down his nose at them, then turn, stepping high, to march off and lie down in some remote corner where only the faintest echoes of their din could reach him.

One evening, while Julius and I were at choir-practice, we heard something that distressed me greatly. I felt that I could not stay, so we slipped out and hurried home. As soon as we were inside of our own door I threw myself into Julius's arms with childlike sobbing.

He tried to comfort me, but I could only hear my own heart-

throbs. All at once he exclaimed, —

"Look, Judith, look at Bruno!"

His tone was so strange, it penetrated even my grief. I raised my head and there was Bruno, standing upright, his head against Julius's shoulder, as close to me as he could get, his eyes full of tears, the picture of woe.

"You see Bruno is crying too," said Julius.

As soon as Bruno saw me look up, he threw back his head and wagged his tail as if to say, —

"Come now, that's better, much better."

My tears still fell, but they were no longer bitter. There was something about the sympathy of that dumb creature which touched a chord not to be reached by anything human. It was so unlooked for and so sincere.

It was wonderful how he entered into all our feelings. In those days I was very much afraid of thunder-storms. In some subtle way Bruno divined this and kept the closest watch for clouds. If the heavens began to be overcast, he would go from window to window, noting developments, coming to me every few minutes to look into my face and wag his tail reassuringly.

When our fears were verified and the storm broke, he would come to rest his head on my knee, wincing with me at the thunders and flashes. When the worst was over, and big scattering drops showed the end of the storm to be near, he would drop at my feet with a huge sigh of relief that showed what a nervous strain he had been enduring.

He also discovered a strong aversion I had for spiders, and went about killing every one he could find. Chancing to be at my side one day when I dodged and exclaimed at the too familiar dartings of a wasp that was flying around me, he from that time made it a rule to destroy flying bugs of all kinds, often jumping high in the air to catch them.

CHAPTER III

Now approached a troublous time in Bruno's career. He fell into bad ways. We always thought it was Leo who tempted him.

It developed in this way. Soon after dark Bruno would ask to have the door opened for him to go out. He would look as innocent as if he only meant to step around to the well for a fresh drink. At bedtime we would suddenly remember that we had heard nothing of him since he had been let out. Julius would open the door expecting to find him lying on the porch. Disappointed in this, he would whistle, call, whistle again, but there would be no answer. At last we would give him up and go to bed. At gray dawn there would be a sound of scratching on the door, and when it was opened Bruno would come in, muddy, draggled, and exhausted. After drinking with evident relish from his water-bowl, he would curl up on his bed and sleep till noon.

We scolded him about these "tears," as we called them, until he would in spite of his fatigue go through with his tricks on being admitted in the morning: he would "sit up" and offer to "shake hands" with first one paw, then the other; trying to propitiate whichever of us opened the door for him. But he would not give up the "tears." Then we tried chaining him for the night. This kept him at home for nearly a week, until he finally succeeded in pulling out the staple that held the chain. In the morning Bruno, chain, and all had vanished; for it was summer-time and we had

chained him outside, under an open shed. The hours crept on towards afternoon, and still he came not. I had heard at intervals all day the distant yelping of a dog, but had only noticed it to suppose that a neighbor some few blocks away had had occasion to tie up his watch-dog. As evening approached, I anxiously awaited the return of Julius from his office that he might go in search of our missing Bruno.

While I was waiting, the milkman came along.

"Where's your dog?" he asked, as he poured out the milk.

Bruno and Rebecca always watched for the milkman and were first to greet him; this day only Rebecca was there.

"I wish I knew," I answered; "he ran off in the night dragging his chain, and we don't know what has become of him."

"There's a big brown dog that looks just like yours chained to the sidewalk over yonder beyond Mr. Black's."

He jerked his head in the direction whence the yelping sounds had come.

Uncle Edwards was then spending a few days with us. He was one of those people who believe that sooner or later all dogs go mad, and that it is as much as one's life is worth to come within ten feet of them. He and Bruno were on the most distant terms of mutual toleration.

But I was desperate. Julius had not come, and I must be at home in case Bruno did arrive hungry, thirsty, and footsore. There was no help for it; I must ask assistance from Uncle Edwards.

He was a gentleman of the old school, always obliging and courteous. He would bow politely and pick up a loaded shell with burning fuse attached, if asked to do so by a lady.

He readily agreed to go round by Mr. Black's to see if by any chance the "big brown dog chained to the sidewalk" could be ours. He shortly returned, leading by the extreme end of his chain a very crestfallen Bruno; tired, hungry, thirsty, his throat raw with ineffectual yelpings.

Delighted and relieved as I was to see him, I still had room for a smothered laugh at his and Uncle Edwards's attitude to each other as they approached. Uncle regarded Bruno out of the tail of his eye, as if he were some infernal machine, liable at any moment to do things unheard of; while Bruno, perfectly aware of his distrust, threw tired, meekly humorous glances out of the tail of *his* eye. It was comical.

His chain had caught in a cleft board of the sidewalk, and he had been held there, struggling and yelping, part of the night and all day! All who had happened to see him thought he had been fastened there for some purpose or other.

This was a pretty severe lesson for Bruno, and it kept him at home for several nights. At last temptation again overcame him, and at bedtime one night he was missing. When he returned at dawn, his side was peppered with small bloody wounds. He had been shot!

"That settles it," said Julius; "he has been chasing sheep!"

We were extremely troubled at this discovery, and Julius said,

"Our life is too quiet for him. His instincts are all for chasing something. Our little promenades are but an aggravation to a dog who is longing to stretch his legs over miles of country."

We knew he must go at least six miles to find sheep.

For the first time we now began seriously to consider the idea of giving Bruno away.

A young hunter, whom we will call Mr. Nimrod, had long been wanting him. He told us it was a shame to turn such a splendid fellow into a drawing-room dog. He would hold forth indefinitely on Bruno's points, especially certain extra toes on his various legs. He said a dog with such toes was built for a "lightning-express" runner, and that it was outraging nature to try to keep him cooped up in a village lot. After many discussions we at last decided we ought to give him up to the life for which he so evidently longed.

We were about to move into the house we had been building, and we thought the best way to make the dog-transfer would be for Julius to take him to Mr. Nimrod's the last day before we moved, so that if he ran away and came to find us, there would be only the deserted house.

It did not occur to us that this would be cruel. We knew we were giving him up for his own good, and we felt sure he would soon get wonted to his new home, where he could live the life for which he was created. So, on the last evening in the old home, Julius took up his hat, which was always a signal to Bruno, who

came and sat up before him, with ears at "attention," which was his way of asking, —

"May I go?"

"Yes, Boonie can go," answered Julius.

Then Bruno, who had long since learned to understand the difference between "go" and "stay," went bounding down the walk, leaped over the gate, and began rushing back and forth along in front of the lot, giving short barks of delight. Julius called him back, and he came rather crestfallen, thinking he was, after all, to "stay;" but it was only that I might hug him and tell him, "Good-bye, you must be a good doggie!"

This puzzled him; but his bewilderment was soon forgotten in the fact that he was really and truly to "go." When Julius returned an hour later, he told me he had slipped away while Mr. and Mrs. Nimrod were petting Bruno, and so had escaped a formal leave-taking. I was glad of this, for I had dreaded their parting.

In spite of the fact that I was the one to attend to Bruno's wants — that he always came to me when hungry or thirsty, and that I never disciplined him as Julius sometimes did, — still he showed in many ways that Julius's place in his heart was far above mine. So I was relieved that there had been no good-byes.

We were both entirely engrossed for the next few days by getting moved and settled. In spite of busy hands, I had many times felt a tugging at the heart-strings for the absent Bruno. I said nothing about it, though; and Julius afterwards confessed that he too had felt longings, but had suppressed them for fear of

upsetting me, just as I had concealed my feelings on his account.

On the afternoon of the fourth day Julius could stand it no longer; he must have some news of Bruno. So he looked up Mr. Nimrod.

Before he could ask any questions, Mr. Nimrod began, —

"What did you feed that dog, anyway?"

"Why, the same things we ate," answered Julius, in surprise; "whatever there was on the table."

"Well, he won't eat anything for us. We've tried everything we could think of. What does he like best?"

"Well," said Julius, "he likes biscuit and toast and fried mush, — all sorts of crisp and crackly things; and bones, — little ones that he can bite, — and meats of course."

"We've tried everything except the toast and mush. We'll try him on those. I'll go right home now and see about it."

When Julius came home and repeated this conversation to me, it produced what may without exaggeration be called a state of mind. I was half wild. All the emotions I had been struggling to conceal since Bruno's departure now held sway. Julius was deeply moved too. We could only comfort each other by recalling all the trouble we had had with Bruno, from the anxious night of his first "tear," to that last morning when he had returned wounded and bloody.

We assured each other that he would soon consent to be happy in such a good home, and that it would be wrong for us to indulge our feelings to his ultimate hurt. We dwelt especially on the fact

that if he should again go sheep-chasing and be shot at, he stood at least a chance of being fatally wounded.

Thus we talked ourselves into a reasonable frame of mind.

CHAPTER IV

I knew, without anything being said about it, that Julius would lose no time the next day in finding out if Bruno had consented to eat his supper. When he started down town a whole hour earlier than usual, I knew, as well as if he had said so, that it was in order to have time to hunt up Mr. Nimrod before office hours.

"It's no use," began Mr. Nimrod, as soon as Julius appeared; "wouldn't touch a thing. Never saw such a dog. I believe he's trying to starve himself."

"Don't you think," ventured Julius, "it would be well to bring him out to our house for a little visit, to cheer him up?"

"Not much!" answered Mr. Nimrod, promptly. "I never could break him in then. He has run away twice already, and both times I followed him and found him hanging around the house you moved from. Lucky the trail was cold. If he once finds out where you are, the jig's up."

When Julius came home at noon, we sat at the table listless and dejected, now and then making fitful attempts to converse. The dainty noon meal had suddenly lost flavor after we had exchanged a few sentences about "Poor, hungry Bruno!"

Were we to eat, drink, and be merry, while our faithful friend starved for love of us!

After Julius had returned to the office, there was such a tugging at my heart-strings that I – well, yes, I did, I cried! How

I regretted that I had never cultivated an intimacy with Mrs. Nimrod, so that I might have "run in" to call, and thus have an opportunity to comfort the poor homesick fellow!

Julius saw the tear-traces when he returned towards evening, and proposed a stroll down town; thinking, I suppose, that if we sat at home we should be sure to talk of Bruno and be melancholy.

We walked through all the principal streets of the town, meeting and greeting friends and acquaintances, stopping to glance at new goods in several of the shops; bringing up at last in the town's largest bookstore.

We were just starting for home, when on the sidewalk there was a sudden flurry and dash, and Bruno, stomach to earth, was crawling about us, uttering yelps and whines that voiced a joy so great it could not be told from mortal agony.

Regardless of the fact that we were on the most public thoroughfare of the town, I fell on my knees to hug him, and could not keep back tears of mingled joy and pain. His poor thin sides! His gasps of rapture! Oh, Boonie, Boonie!

The first excitement over, we looked about us for Mr. Nimrod. He was nowhere to be seen. Bruno had evidently escaped, and was running away to look for us when he had chanced to strike our trail and so had found us.

We were glad he was alone. We both felt that if he had been torn from us at that supreme moment he would have died; he was so faint with fasting and grief, and then the overwhelming

joy at finding those he had thought to be forever lost to him! He squeezed himself in between us, and kept step as we went homeward in the gathering twilight.

As soon as we reached home, we hurried him to the kitchen to enjoy the sight of the poor fellow at his trencher. How we fed him! I ransacked the pantry for the things he liked best, till his sides began to swell visibly. He paused between mouthfuls to feast his loving eyes on first one, then the other of us, and his tail never once stopped wagging. Rebecca came purring in to rub against his legs, and even submitted with shut eyes to a kiss from his big wet tongue. He must have felt that such an hour repaid him for all his sufferings.

After he had eaten until he evidently could not take another morsel, we drew him in front of us as we sat side by side, for a three-cornered talk. He sat on end, waving his tail to and fro on the floor, wrinkling his forehead and cocking up his ears, while we explained the situation to him.

We told him how kind Mr. Nimrod meant to be to him, how he would train him to hunt and take him on long daily runs. Then we reminded him how impossible it was for Julius to go on such excursions with him, and of how many scrapes he had got into by going alone, – he seeming to take it all in and to turn it over in his mind.

Then we told him that since he had found our new home he could come often to see us, and he would always find us glad to see him, – yes, more than glad!

Then Julius got his hat and said, —

"Come on, Boonie; now we're going home."

He seemed quite willing to go. I told him good-by with a heart so light I could scarcely believe it the same one I had felt to be such a burden when I had set off for our walk two hours earlier. I busied myself then preparing a little supper against Julius's return; for we had not been able to eat since breakfast, and I knew by my own feelings that Julius would welcome the sight of a well-spread smoking table; and he said on his return that I "guessed just right."

He and Bruno had found the Nimrods very much disturbed over their dog's disappearance. Mr. Nimrod had just returned from an unsuccessful search, and they were wondering what to do next. They welcomed the wanderer, but were concerned, too, that he had discovered our dwelling-place.

"I'm afraid we'll have to keep him tied up now," said Mr. Nimrod.

Julius thought not, and said, —

"Now that he knows where we are, and can come for a glimpse of us now and then, I believe he'll be better contented than he was when he thought we'd left the country."

Better contented he certainly was, but he positively refused to stay at home. It soon came to be a regular thing for Julius to escort him back every evening.

The Nimrods lived nearly a mile from us, so Julius did not lack for exercise.

Mr. Nimrod finally came to remonstrate with us.

"You ought to shut him out," he cried, "then he'd have to come back home."

For answer, Julius showed him certain long, deep scratches on our handsome new doors, adding, —

"Don't you see? It's as much as our doors are worth to shut him out, and he leaps that four-foot fence as if it were but four inches."

There was obviously no possible reply to such logic as this; so he continued to come, — dragging sometimes a rope or strap, or some other variety of tether, triumphantly proving that love laughs at locksmiths!

The Nimrods at last lost heart. Bruno never would eat there, and he never stayed when he could manage to escape. One night it was raining hard when the time came for him to be taken "home," so they did not go; and that seemed to settle it.

He was our dog.

We had given him away without his consent, and he refused to be given; so the trade was off. He stayed closely at home now, seeming to think we might disappear again if he did not watch us.

CHAPTER V

Unless there were guests in the house, we usually slept with all the inner doors wide open for better circulation of air.

One night we were awakened by tremendous barkings and growlings from Bruno. Julius spoke to him, and he answered with a whine. Then we could hear his feet pad-padding on the carpet as he went from our room, tap-tapping on the oil-cloth in the hall, pad-padding again through the sitting-room and the dining-room, then tap-tapping on the painted kitchen floor, with more loud barks and deep growls.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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