

CHAPTER VII. The Juggernaut

Everyone seems to have known Lady, incidentally. Oh! And another thing; Rhuburger's father used to be seen around, occasionally, with a rather bizarre character known as Bilke. Bilke has a certain hobby. Namely, running over dogs. He'd driven that route scores of times, with Rhuburger and without him, just for the dog-chasing. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, it seems. Rhuburger, it turns out, had a pact with Bilke about competing for 'records' in dog-killing. It was rather an open secret." There was a moment of sick silence.

"Then," continued Maclay, "Rhuburger is going to sue us and press charges against Lad. But several local people who saw the whole affair are more than ready to testify on Lad's behalf, citing the man's history and the provocation. Plus, Rhuburger being the known character he is, well, I'd say his case doesn't stand on very strong legs. In the meantime, I've been told a group intends to start a petition for Lad, asserting he acted in defense of the community's safety. So, I wouldn't worry overly much. It looks like the whole village is on your and Lad's side."

The Mistress and the Master exchanged glances.

"I had no idea," said the Master slowly, "that things would take this turn. But Lad?" Maclay smiled. "Lad's going to be just fine. You've got a hero on your hands. The odds are overwhelmingly in his favor. Just see to that he's kept safe and sound until this blows over, eh?"

As Maclay drove away, the Mistress and the Master went back inside, finding Lad waiting for them, an aura of calm around him as though he already understood the crisis was passing. He nuzzled them gently, as if grateful.

"Looks like you're more than just our hero, laddie," murmured the Master, scratching Lad behind the ears. Lad gave a soft woof of contentment, his tail thumping gently on the floor. For the first time since Lady's tragic end, there was a spark of the old light of joy in his eyes.

