

*Bat*  
*and*  
*Blob*



**The tale of two little dogs**



I looked up 'pet' and the dictionary said a domestic or tamed animal kept for pleasure or companionship. The other meaning of the noun was one I hadn't come across before, it said 'a feeling of petty resentment or ill-humour'. I have to say that, thus far, neither of our two dogs had displayed much of this although one of them, Mollie, was certainly beginning to reveal her own particular brand of irritability.

Mollie was a dog of quality, a pedigree Yorkshire terrier, although a little big for the breed. She knew her position in life and always acted accordingly. But chocolate box bow in her hair she wasn't. I kept her hair quite short as it was more manageable that way. When we first got her it was much longer and walks in the country were something to be avoided because sticky burrs, leaves and twigs would attach themselves to her pampas grass tail and legs and she would frequently just stop dead because a foreign body impeded progress. It wasn't really that bad, but then she always was a bit of a drama queen. Thus we always had to keep a weather eye out for her stopping abruptly and being left far behind. Nothing would induce her to move until the offending article(s) had been removed. Then there was the dirt, grit, stones and mud that she would gather along the way. As I said, from those early days we kept her coat very short, but even with it short, because of her relatively low ground clearance a post-walk bath was usually necessary.



Cutting her hair was a bit of an ordeal, and it took quite a few practice efforts before I was totally happy with my handiwork. She allowed me glimpses of her more irritable side when she would wriggle and squirm and I rather unfairly expected her to be so still. After about an hour and a half she would have had quite enough and



out of fairness I had to cease operations and finish later in the day. Anyway it would take me that time to clear up the clouds of fluffy hair. I did try to work my way evenly through the cutting process as she had caught me out once or twice and looked most comical with only one side cut, or two legs left untidily long. Once it was cut, her ears assumed large proportions; they were furry, triangular and upright, rather like a fennec fox, or at the very least a bat. Or if I was

thinking particularly tenderly about her, she was like a teddy bear.

Mollie, as befitted her station, liked things to go her way and if a proposal was not to her liking she would turn and walk off, pampas grass aloft. She could be obdurate and hold out for exactly what she wanted or she wouldn't accept it, like the black biscuit in the mixed ovals pack, or deciding she didn't want to lie by my feet, she needed to be further up the bed and on the left hand side. She would have an inexplicable attack of deafness and wouldn't come if she didn't want to. If the mood didn't take her she wouldn't sit, or stay or act like a good dog in any way and she didn't always feel like playing but magical to watch when she did.

Once bitten by the ball bug, Mollie, too, was hooked. In the park she would snatch it and head for the nearest inclined slope. She would then growl at the ball for a while then let it go, tapping with a paw to control its rate of flow. It was hilarious, but became a bit of a pain when she headed off for distant hills and no amount of calling would get her back. But it took some time for her to realise the difference between a hillock and almost no incline at all. We were hoist by our own petard

because, having introduced her to the delights of a ball, it would dominate her life until we could get it back off her.

Without doubt the most extraordinary thing she did was to take a ball to the top of the stairs and nudge it with her nose so that it bounced down the entire flight; if the launch trajectory wasn't quite right she would dive down a few steps, collect it up and start it off again. We always got bored before she did.



From this she developed another game that she could play in-house. She would disappear for a not-insignificant time somewhere in the house during which time she would be doing her best to bury somewhere the object she had just retrieved, be it a chew, ball, soft toy. The technique was to find a towel or some clothes within which, and amid heavy breathing that came from great excitement and exercise, she would do her best to conceal the object. From what I could see it took a lot of effort and she wasn't very good at it as I could usually still see part of the object sticking out. Often I would come across things buried in the bed, and was not best pleased when despite closed doors she managed to gain access to the bedrooms and ruin not just one but two silk bedcovers with jagged holes and pulled threads.



The other sort of play was more intimate and involved me getting down on all fours, putting my face towards hers and tugging gently at each foot in turn. After a while whatever playfulness she had would usually turn to irritability and a strange little growl would let you know quite clearly that her tolerance level had been reached. If I carried on tugging and thrusting my face further towards hers then it would be at my peril and she would strike like a rattlesnake, clamping her teeth over the end of my nose. It was exquisitely painful and she had been known to draw blood. No, you didn't overstep the mark with Mollie.

She would always be enthusiastic when we produced her lead, and once hooked up she performed what I called the walk dance consisting of running with her bottom squarely tucked in rather like running sitting up. She picked delicately at her food and was also very ladylike in performing her daily functions. In the early days when we first had her it caused a bit of a problem as we were living in the centre of Bath. Let me explain. Because she was so particular, and because the residents of that glorious city were also very particular (and rightly so), there was much net curtain twitching whenever we took a walk, I often had to make several excursions before she would perform.

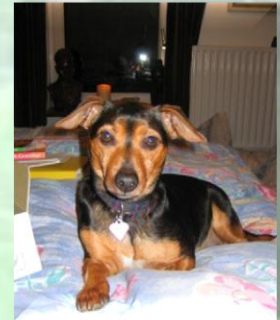
As was often the way, the very days she had partaken of a hide chew or some other similar delicacy, she would have less control and deposit a glutinous one - horror of horrors - on the pavement and in full view. I would frantically try and scrape it off with varying degrees of success. I remember on one of those messier walks I was kneeling down scraping and one of those well-bred and well-intentioned ladies went past and said, "disgusting how people let their dogs go just anywhere". I had no control of where and when Mollie went, and at those times she seemed to have even less.

She had a bark that was pure theatre. That's because it wasn't really a bark, more a yappy whisper. It was the cause of much hilarity during our daily walk into the

office as we had to pass a skateboard park. She would go absolutely berserk snapping and barking and I would go through the motions of remonstrating with her, but she would have none of it. It was so amusing, the sight of a small dog taking on a group of adolescents nervously contemplating what would happen if she sunk her teeth into their precious designer labelled sportswear, while at the same time rolling about laughing at her pathetic bark. She continued to hate skateboards and I had no idea why, something in her early life perhaps? She was eight months when we got her and heaven knows why someone would want to get rid of such an adorable, barkless dog, and also what traumas she had been exposed to before we got her.

Everyone loved Mollie, she was pretty, she was sweet and she always seemed well behaved. Having developed her independent streak, her propensity to ignore our warning call no matter how urgent nearly cost her her life. One Sunday morning we took her for a stroll along the canal. My mistake was letting her off the lead, but let her off I did. We came to the site of a demolished factory and she spied a mallard quacking at the edge of the bank. "Mollie, come back", I implored. She accelerated. "Mollie" she was in full flow now.

**"Mollie, MOLL..."** It was too late, the mallard neatly sidestepped and Mollie disappeared from sight. The mallard quacked triumphantly, you could almost see his wings clapping. My god, what do we do about Mollie? It was a ten foot drop into the canal and the steep iron clad bank was adorned with prickles and thorns. It was also mid-winter. I don't want to bore you with the rescue operation but suffice to say it involved one of us diving in and the other helping to pull them out with an uprooted tree root. By the time she was scooped out of the water she was fading fast. As we made our wet way home over the bridge and back the other side, I was glad I had put her on the lead because there was the blessed mallard again, quacking on the muddy bank. What did she do? She lunged at him again! The walk back was turning out to be quite eventful because as we approached the town centre, she stepped right out in front of a bus on a busy corner and I just yanked her back in time. The bus driver shook his fist. That day began her love affair with all things aquatic, and opened my eyes to another side of her.



The status quo changed when Winifred came along. Winnie was a cross between a Jack Russell and Manchester Terrier. Black and tan, she had enormous folds of skin at strategic points around her body. She shivered a lot but in time would grow into a smaller version of her heroine, the docile but deadly Doberman. She was eight weeks when we bought her off a very strange Greek lady who professed herself to be heartbroken when I selected Winnie, big tears rolling quickly down her cheeks but nowhere near as quickly as the speed she pocketed the proffered £150. We did come across her just once about a month later in the very bustling centre of Bath. I recognised the bow legs first, encased in dirty black leggings. She saw Winnie and to my embarrassment she fell to the ground and moved toward us on all fours, "my darleengah, oh my little angel, coma to me." That was the first time I heard Winnie growl and it grew in volume until I got a bit concerned that Mrs whoever she was, quite oblivious to this parlous state of affairs, would be savaged. I pulled Winnie back from the brink and we went on our way.

Winnie was supposed to be a companion for Mollie and it was to take quite a time before they really gelled. Winnie continued to shiver a lot, whine a lot, eat a lot and

crap a lot; in general act like the baby she was. Mollie became insecure and began to push for more attention that we earnestly tried to give, but this time coincided with us moving to a small farm in Devon. There was a lot to do and no time to fuss around, although Winnie enjoyed being picked up and carried; at least that stopped her shivering.



Once on the farm Mollie really came into her own. Unnoticed, she would wander off for hours in the fields coming back only when she pleased. Sometimes the hair around her neck would be in stiff peaks, testimony to her having rolled in something unmentionable. She expanded her ball game to include knobbly sticks and the darker side of her nature would manifest itself. Quivering all over like a thing possessed, she would bite into them relentlessly, spitting out the splinters. When it was totally dead she would pester us for another with a smile on her face.

We had two lakes and a pond and once a piece of wood had been thrown in she would hurl herself after it, and swim around until she found it. Of course, the said object would be savaged as soon as she got it out of the water. She was a game little dog and despite breathing so heavily it sounded painful, she made it her business to let you know she was waiting for another one, please. The size of stick didn't matter, she even retrieved tree-sized branches and it was heart-rending sometimes to see her spring wearing down as she struggled to lift herself and her prey out of the water. She would revert to her default personality once we got home, lap dog inside, tireless retriever outside.



We covered a lot of miles to and from the farm during which time Winnie was always car sick and although we didn't anticipate doing such mileage all the time, we still couldn't be doing with a dog that couldn't travel. She grew out of it, however. She followed us around like the faithful friend she was and her nickname soon became Blob as whatever we did, wherever we went outside she would plonk herself on the periphery like a spectre at the feast. A triangular black blob. Her ears, typical Jack Russell, looked like they had been dropped on to her head as an afterthought. She was such a curious shape, very long in the back, short in the leg, so much so that when she sat down her bottom was tucked underneath and her back legs, often crossed, waved aimlessly in the air.

But Winnie was the sweetest natured dog, so affectionate, obedient and loving. Don't get me wrong, Mollie was loving if a little distant at times and would only stay on your lap, for instance, if you continually stroked her. Otherwise she would go from person to person in her search for petted bliss and once she found a suitable donor she would lie for hours on her back, eyes rolling in utter contentment.

She was naughty in her greediness and, should we forget to move it out of her reach, raided the bin regularly, extracting spent tins, cream and yoghurt pots,

licking them to within an inch of their life and discarding them with tell-tale tooth marks all over the house. Her lust for life and energy were infectious and she would bound around the place. She was a quick learner and a joy to have around, though the problem was always when she was left and the howling started (I am reliably informed).

We had mice at the farm but neither dog showed any interest in the scratchings above our heads and in the walls. Rats were quite a different matter and as soon as she heard them, Winnie would tremble all over, demanding to be let out then launch herself into the night with an unearthly howl. Like the Mounties, she was fearless and always got her rat but not without collecting some battle scars along the way. At these times the only exercise Mollie would get was to open one eye.

She was short legged, barrel-chested and muscular, with a tail like a whiplash. In full flight, the kindest thing you could say about her was that she was uncoordinated; legs askew, tail pointed upwards and confection of ears were two inverted black triangles. Poor little soul. Presumably teething she ate my best black trousers, inflicted significant damage on my dictionary, scratched my reading glasses and savaged my Oakley sunglasses that were supposed to be able to stop a bullet at 20 paces or whatever. I was angry and tethered her to a post; she bit her way through but looked so unhappy that I couldn't do that to her again, except once - the day she (all but) killed Opal.

Opal was an orphan lamb and I had spent an inordinate amount of time nurturing her back to health despite making a promise that I would not buy runts of the litter again. As Mollie's style of play was very self-contained, that wasn't much fun for Winnie, so she was delighted to finally have a playmate. When we eventually noticed what was going on, Opal was lying on her side, out of breath and looking half dead, which she was.



She had bite marks all around her neck and was in shock but Winnie still wanted to play. I still can't believe she had malice aforethought; she never attacked any other stock, not even our free-to-wander chickens, not even the chickens when they competed with her and Mollie for bacon rinds and leftover spaghetti!

Winnie could never understand Mollie's fascination with the ball, or other jettisoned objects. Mollie could not understand Winnie's preoccupation with food. I bought some expensive organic sausages and had to leave them and the dogs in the car for a few minutes. In the absence of anywhere safe, I stowed them safely in my handbag and closed up the zip. I had to admire Winnie's inventiveness (Winnie always got the blame for anything food-related) as when we returned within that short time she had somehow undone the zip and extracted the sausages. There they were on the back seat sharing the illicit meal, but Winnie was very cute because as soon as she saw us she jumped off, leaving Mollie in sole possession.

Unlike Mollie's sad effort, Winnie's bark was one we could be proud of. It varied in depth from baritone to bass and made a statement, ie don't mess with me. We needed one of the dogs to have a decent bark. A bit of a novelty for us; she groomed herself and always smelled fresh and sweet but being high born Mollie was always waiting for someone to come and do it for her. This could result in klingons entwined with the longer hair around her nether regions that often had to be cut



out, and the long pampas grass tail covered a multitude of sins needing frequent baths. Whilst we are on this less than savoury subject, Winnie gulped down her food, so much so that she would often regurgitate it and have another go. Not only that, if Mollie was ever sick, Winnie could be relied upon to clear it up!

They looked sweet sleeping together by day and they would creep onto our bed at night, always in the same position. Mollie on top of the covers, pushing against the small of my back while Winnie crawled underneath the duvet, whatever the weather, it was her preferred place. Of course she hyperventilated, but she was a useful hot water bottle for extra chilly nights. How did she manage to breathe? I haven't the faintest idea but she's not dead yet.

So they lived together, slept together, ate together and even came into season together when they were more than a little interested in each other. We tended to write off several weeks at those times, learning to turn a blind eye to their misplaced lust for each other. At other times, Winnie would 'top and tail' Mollie when she came into the room to see what she had been doing - eating or going to the toilet?

Mollie grew to be fond of hustler Winnie, but always tried to get in there first and get her tummy rubbed. But in true survival of the fittest tradition, when they would frequently huddle together on the most comfortable armchair it would be Winnie sleeping on top of Mollie's head, and she would always push Mollie out of the way to gain our favours. At mealtimes, though, she would always keep a discreet distance until Mollie had finished so obviously this was canine pack behaviour, deferring to Mollie's seniority. Recognising it didn't mean she agreed with it, though.

And as I sit here looking at them they are fast asleep on different chairs. Mollie snores loudly and Winnie sleeps with the omnipresent ear cocked. If I just shift in my chair either one or both of Winnie's eyes quickly open, depending on how much I move; she could miss out on some food if she didn't follow me downstairs... They have just been given a pig's ear to chew and as usual, each wanted the other's and for a while Mollie had two. It has exhausted them.



They say owners look like their dogs so I can take my pick. If you see a greying, untidy looking blonde with brown lovely eyes and a blue collar walking down the road or a stout dark thirty-something lady with funny ears, close cropped hair, a good tan and a thickening waist then do stop me and say hello!

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NB - Mollie died in December 2006 and this is my small tribute to her.