



CHAPTER I

His Mate

Lad was an eighty-pound collie, a thoroughbred in spirit and in blood. He had inherited his gentle dignity from endless generations of purebred ancestors. He was also courageous and wise. His shaggy coat, set off by the snowy ruff and chest, was like orange-flecked mahogany. His tiny forepaws were silvery white. And who could doubt, after looking into his mournful brown eyes, that he had a soul?

Three years earlier, when Lad was not yet fully grown, Lady was brought to The Place. She arrived in The Master's overcoat pocket, rolled up into a fuzzy gold-gray ball no bigger than a kitten. The Master fished the month-old puppy out of his deep pocket and set her down on the veranda floor. Lad walked cautiously across the veranda and sniffed at the blinking pup, who dared to growl up at him so boldly.

From that first moment, Lad became Lady's protector. Then, as the shapeless yellow baby

grew into a graceful collie, Lad's guardianship changed to pure adoration. He became Lady's slave for life. And she bossed the gentle giant in a shameful manner. She crowded him from the warmest spot by the fire, snatched the tastiest bones from his mouth, and pestered him into romping on The Lawn in hot weather, when he would much rather have dozed under the trees.

Lad joyfully put up with Lady's teasing, moodiness, and outbursts of temper. In Lad's eyes, all she did was perfect. And Lady, like many humans, enjoyed being idolized.

Life at The Place was wonderfully pleasant for both dogs. There were thick woods to roam in. There were squirrels to chase, and rabbits to trail. There was the ice-cool lake to plunge into for a swim, after a run in the July heat. There was a marvelously comfortable old rug in front of the fireplace to lie upon, shoulder to shoulder, on cold winter nights. Best of all, they agreed, there were The Master and The Mistress—especially The Mistress.

Any man with money may become a dog's owner. But no man may become a dog's Master unless the dog agrees. And once a dog accepts a man as Master, that Master becomes that dog's god. To both Lad and Lady, the man who bought them was not simply their owner.

He was the absolute master, the unquestioned lord of life and death, the eternal law. His was the voice that must be obeyed, whatever the command.

From earliest puppyhood, both Lad and Lady had been brought up by The Master to act according to The Law. As far back as they could remember, they had known and obeyed The Place's simple code. For example, they were allowed to chase all animals of the woods. However, they must ignore The Mistress's prize chickens and the other little creatures of The Place, no matter how much a collie felt like playing.

They must not bark, except as a friendly greeting, at any human who was walking openly or riding down the drive into The Place during the daytime. But they must attack on sight anyone sneaking onto the grounds.

Another law said that the inside of the house was sacred. It was a place for perfect behavior. No rug must be scratched. Nothing could be gnawed or played with. In fact, Lady's only whipping was for breaking this law. That was when, as a foolish puppy, she had tried to play with the huge stuffed eagle displayed in The Master's study.

The Master loved the eagle, which he had shot as it raided the flock of prize chickens. So

after Lady played with it, he taught her a painful lesson that made her cringe for weeks afterward at the sight of the dog whip. To this day, she never walked past the eagle without taking the widest way around it. For Lady would no more have thought of playing with the eagle than a human would think to stand on his head in church.

Then, early one spring, Knave arrived at The Place. He was a showy, magnificent collie, with alert golden eyes and a coat that was reddish gold, except for a patch of black across his back. Knave did not belong to The Master, but to a man who asked him to care for the dog while he was away in Europe. The Master had willingly agreed.

When The Master arrived on the train from town, a crowd of people flocked to the baggage car to admire the fine-looking collie. But the grouchy old baggage man grumbled, "Maybe he's a thoroughbred, like you say. But have you ever seen a thoroughbred that had streaks of pinkish yellow on the roof of its mouth?"

Thinking such criticism silly, Knave simply yawned.

When The Master finally got off the train, Knave pulled joyously at the leash. As The Master reached The Place, both Lad and Lady came tearing around the side of the house

to greet him. Upon seeing and smelling the strange dog prancing at his side, the two collies stopped short. Up went their ruffs. Down went their heads.

Lady crouched forward to battle the stranger, who was taking up so much of The Master's attention. Knave, who was quite willing to fight (especially with a smaller dog), braced himself and then moved forward, baring his fangs. But then he noticed that his enemy was a female. Suddenly his head went up, his lips relaxed, and his tail broke into swift wagging. Lady, noting the stranger's sudden friendliness, paused, uncertain. At that instant Lad darted past her and launched himself at Knave's throat.

The Master cried out, "Down, Lad! Down!"

The collie stopped his attack in midair. Though still furious, his only thought was to obey The Master.

Knave, seeing that Lad was not going to fight, turned once more toward Lady. "Lad!" ordered The Master. "Let him alone. Understand? Let him alone."

Lad understood. He must give up his impulse to make war on this hated intruder. It was The Law. And The Law must be obeyed.

Lad looked on with helpless rage while the newcomer was given the run of The Place. Sad

and confused, he found himself forced to share with this intruder The Master's and Mistress's patting. It was painful to watch Knave playing with Lady, and Lady enjoying his attentions. Gone were the peaceful old days of simple and complete happiness.

Lady had always regarded Lad as her own special property to tease and to boss as she saw fit. But her attitude toward Knave was far different. Like a human girl attracted to a boy, Lady flirted with the gold and black dog. Sometimes she pretended to ignore him. At other times she met his advances with delighted friendliness. But Lady never tried to boss Knave as she had always bossed Lad. Rather, Knave fascinated her. Without seeming to follow him around, she was always at his heels.

Lady began to ignore Lad, which cut him to the heart. So Lad did everything he could think of to win back her attention. He tried to imitate the graceful way that Knave romped and found her rabbits to chase. But it was no use. Lady scarcely noticed him. When his attempts at friendship happened to annoy her, she rewarded them with a snap or an impatient growl. But she always turned to Knave, as if he had hypnotized her.

As Lady's total loss of interest continued, Lad's big heart broke. Being only a dog

and having only noble thoughts, he did not realize that Knave's newness formed a large part of Lady's interest. Nor did he understand that such interest would surely fade in time. All Lad knew was that he loved Lady, and that she was snubbing him for the sake of a flashy stranger. But since The Law forbade him to fight for his Lady's love, Lad sadly withdrew from the unequal contest. He was too proud to compete for a fickle sweetheart.

No longer did Lad try to join in the others' romps. Instead, he lay at a distance, his splendid head between his snowy forepaws, his brown eyes sick with sorrow, watching Lady and Knave frisk about. Lad thought they didn't want him around. So instead of running with them in the woods, he stayed at the house and moped, alone and miserable.

From the beginning, Knave had scornfully ignored Lad. Since he did not understand that The Law did not allow the older collie to fight back, Knave looked down on Lad, assuming he was a coward.

One day, Knave came home from the morning run through the forest without Lady. Even though The Master called and whistled, Lady did not return to The Place. Lad slowly got up from his favorite resting place under the

piano and trotted off to the woods. He did not return.

Several hours later, The Master went to the woods to investigate. Knave followed. At the edge of the forest, The Master shouted. Lad's bark answered from far away. Then The Master made his way through shoulder-deep underbrush in the direction of the sound. In a clearing he found Lady, her left forepaw caught in the steel jaws of a fox trap. Lad was standing protectively above her. Now and then he stooped to lick her foot, which was cruelly pinched in the trap. And he snarled at the hungry crows flapping in the treetops, hoping to attack the victim.

The Master set Lady free, and Knave frisked forward to greet her. But Lady was in no condition to play—not then, nor for many days to come. Her forefoot was so torn and swollen that for weeks she had to hobble on only three legs.

One pantingly hot August morning, Lady limped into the house in search of a cool spot, where she could lie and lick her throbbing forefoot. As usual, Lad was lying under the piano in the living room. His tail thumped a shy welcome as Lady passed. But she didn't even notice him.

On she limped, into The Master's study, where an open window sent a faint breeze

through the house. Keeping her distance from the stuffed eagle, Lady hobbled to the window and started to lie down just beneath it. As she did so, she put too much weight on the sore foot and yelped in pain. At the same moment, a gust of air swept through the living room and blew shut the door of the study. Lady was a prisoner.

Ordinarily, Lady could have jumped out the window and onto the veranda, three feet below. But to make the jump knowing she would land on her injured forepaw—this was a feat beyond her willpower. So Lady accepted her imprisonment. Moaning softly, she curled up on the floor as far as possible from the eagle, and lay still.

At the sound of her first yelp, Lad ran toward her, whining sympathetically. But the closed door blocked his way. He crouched before it, miserable and anxious, helpless to go to his loved one's aid.

Knave, returning from a lone prowl of the woods, also heard the yelp. His sharp ears located the sound at once. He trotted up to the open study window. With a leap, he cleared the sill and landed inside the room. This happened to be his first visit to the study. The door was usually kept shut, so that breezes wouldn't blow around the papers on The Master's desk.

And Knave felt little interest in exploring the interior of houses. He was an outdoor dog, by choice.

Now he advanced toward Lady, his tail wagging, his head cocked to one side. Then, as he came forward into the room, he saw the eagle. He halted in wonder at sight of the enormous bird, with its six-foot wingspan. It was a wholly new sight to Knave. He greeted the eagle with a gruff bark, half of fear, half of bravado. Quickly, however, his sense of smell told him this wide-winged object was not a living thing. Ashamed of his momentary cowardice, he went over to investigate it.

As he went, Knave cast over his shoulder a look that invited Lady to join him. But the memory of that puppyhood beating made her shrink back. Knave thought, with a thrill, that Lady was actually afraid of this harmless thing. Eager to show off for her, and with an inborn craving to destroy, he sprang, growling, upon the eagle.

Down crashed the huge stuffed bird, Knave's white teeth buried deep in the soft feathers of its breast. Lady, horror-struck, whimpered in terror. But her fear only increased Knave's thirst for destruction. He hurled the bird to the floor, and tore the right wing from the body. Coughing out a mouthful of dusty feathers, he

dug his teeth into the eagle's throat. Bracing himself with his forelegs on the carcass, he gave a sharp tug. Head and neck came away in his mouth. And then, before he could drop the mouthful and return to the work of demolition, Knave heard The Master's step.

Having destroyed The Master's property, Knave then showed his ignorance of The Law in a second way. In panic, he bolted for the window, the silvery head of the eagle still between his jaws. With a spring, he shot out through the open window, knocking against Lady's injured leg as he passed.

Knave did not pause at Lady's scream of pain. Nor did he stop until he reached the chicken house. There, he crawled under the floor, and deposited the telltale eagle head in the darkness. Then, finding no one following him, he emerged from the hiding place and jogged innocently back toward the veranda.

The Master heard Lady's cry as he entered the house. Recognizing from the sound that she must be in distress, he looked around for her. His eye fell on Lad, tense and eager, crouching in front of the shut door of the study.

The Master opened the door and went inside. At the first step inside the room, he stopped, amazed. There lay the chewed and battered remains of his beloved eagle. And

there, in a corner, cowered Lady, looking frightened and guilty.

The Master was thunderstruck. For more than two years, Lady had been given free run of the house. What well-bred dog that had graduated from puppyhood would commit such a sin? He would not have believed it. He could not have believed it. Yet here was the terrible evidence, scattered all over the floor. The door was shut, but the window stood wide open. Without a doubt, she had gotten into the room through the window. And he had surprised her before she could escape by the same opening.

The Master was a just man, compared to most humans. But this was a crime even the most sentimental dog lover could not have excused. Moreover, the eagle had been his heart's pride. Without a word, The Master walked to the wall and took down a dog whip, now dust-covered from long disuse.

Lady knew what was coming. Being a thoroughbred, she did not try to run or roll for mercy. She cowered, motionless, awaiting her doom.

Back swished the lash. Down it came, whistling sharply. It struck with full force across Lady's slender flanks. Lady quivered all over. But she made no sound. Although she

whimpered when her sore foot was accidentally touched, she was silent when punished by a human.

But Lad was not silent. As The Master's arm swung back for a second blow, a low growl came from behind him. The Master wheeled around. Lad was close at his heels, fangs bared, head lowered, tawny body taut in every muscle. The Master blinked at him, amazed. Here was something even more unbelievable than Lady's destruction of the eagle. Lad was threatening him. The Impossible had come to pass. For a dog might growl at its owner. But it would never growl at its master. Never.

Lad was miserable. For the first time in his life, his noble soul was torn between his two overpowering loves. He worshiped The Master, whom he had obeyed his entire life. But he loved Lady even more—poor Lady, who had been unjustly blamed and punished. In baring his teeth at his master, Lad knew he was breaking The Law in a way that was punishable by death. Yet still unflinching, he stood his ground.

The Master's jaw set. He was almost as unhappy as the dog. For he understood the situation, and he was man enough to honor Lad's sacrifice. Yet it must be punished, and punished instantly, as any dog master will

swear. If a dog growls and shows his teeth at his master, the master must put down the rebellion at once, or lose his power over his dog forever.

Turning his back on Lady, The Master whirled his whip in the air. Lad saw the lash coming down. He did not flinch. He did not shrink away. The growl ceased. The collie stood erect. Down came the braided whiplash on Lad's shoulders, again over his sides, again and again.

Had a human other than The Master tried to strike him, Lad would have fought back. But now, with dark, tender, unblinking eyes, the hero dog took the whipping. When it was over, he waited only to see The Master throw the dog whip fiercely into a corner of the study. Then, knowing Lady was safe, Lad walked majestically back to his "cave" under the piano. With a long, deep sigh, he lay down.

Lad's spirit was sick and crushed within him. For the first time in his life, he had been struck. Like many dogs, Lad responded better to his master's words than to beatings, which caused humiliation, rather than pain. Through the numbness of his grief, Lad began to feel an overwhelming hate for Knave, the cause of Lady's humiliation. Lad knew what had passed behind that closed study door. For ears and nose tell a collie as much as its eyes.

The Master was as miserable as Lad. For he loved Lad as he would have loved a human son. Though Lad did not realize it, the reason The Master had stopped beating Lady was not to spare Lady's humiliation, but to spare Lad's grief.

The Master simply ordered Lady out of the study. As he watched Lady limp away, he was sorry he'd had to beat his favorite dog. He started gathering up the scattered pieces of the eagle, hoping he could still make a small trophy out of the fierce-eyed, silvery head. But he could not find the head. Then he remembered that Lady had been panting as she slunk out of the room. And dogs that are carrying things in their mouths cannot pant. So she could not have taken the head away with her. The missing head only deepened the whole annoying mystery. Finally, he decided just to give up trying to solve it.

At first, Lad felt so crushed and humiliated that he couldn't bring himself to risk a meeting with Lady. But after two days, he yearned for a sight of her. So he went out of the house in search of her. He traced her to the cool shade of a clump of lilacs near the outbuildings. There, Lady had dug a little pit in the cool earth with one paw and was curled up, asleep, under the bushes. Stretched out beside her was Knave.

Lad's spine bristled at sight of his enemy. But ignoring him, he moved over to Lady and tenderly touched her nose with his own. She opened one eye, blinked drowsily, and went to sleep again.

But Lad's coming had awakened Knave. Refreshed by his nap, Knave woke in a playful mood. He tried to encourage Lady to romp with him, but she preferred to doze. So, searching about in his shallow mind for something to play with, Knave remembered the prize he had hidden beneath the chicken house. Away he trotted, soon returning with the eagle's head between his teeth. As he ran, he tossed it in the air, catching it as it fell. This was a clever trick he had learned with a tennis ball.

Lad, who had lain down as near to Lady as he dared, looked up and saw his rival approach. Seeing what Knave was playing with made him mad. Here was the thing that had caused Lady's punishment and his own black disgrace. And Knave was boldly using it for his own selfish pleasure.

For the second time in his life, Lad broke The Law. In an instant, he forgot The Master's command to "Let him alone!" Noiselessly, terrifyingly, Lad flew at the playful Knave.

Just in time, Knave noticed the attack. He was mildly surprised that the dog he had looked

down on as a coward should have developed a flash of spirit. But he was eager to wage a battle that would gain him more glory in Lady's eyes. Dropping the eagle's head, Knave sprang forward to meet his enemy.

Knave was three years younger than Lad and about five pounds heavier. Moreover, constant exercise had kept him in top condition. In contrast, lonely brooding at home had begun to soften Lad's tough muscles.

Like two furry whirlwinds, the collies spun forward toward each other. They met, reared up, and snarled. Like wolves, they slashed for the throat, while clawing madly to keep their balance. Then down they went, rolling in a savage embrace, snapping, tearing, growling. Lad went straight for the throat. But he missed the center, the only area of a collie's throat that isn't protected by a tangle of hair. A handful of Knave's golden ruff came away in his jaws.

Over and over they rolled. They regained their footing and reared again. Lad's saber-shaped fang ripped a gash in Knave's forehead. In return, Knave's half-deflected slash caused the big vein at the top of Lad's left ear to bleed.

By now, Lady was wide awake. Knowing she was to be the winner's prize, she watched every turn of the fight with wild excitement. Rearing up once more, the dogs clashed, chest-

to-chest. Like one of his wolf ancestors, Knave dived for Lad's forelegs, hoping to break one of them between his foaming jaws. But he missed the hold by a fraction of an inch. Only the skin was torn. Down over the little white forepaw ran a trickle of blood.

That miss was a costly error for Knave. For Lad's teeth then sank deep into his enemy's left shoulder. Knave twisted and wheeled with lightning speed and with all his strength. Yet all his struggles would not have been enough to set him free. But then Lad started choking on Knave's fur, which stuck in his throat and blocked his nostrils. Gasping for breath, Lad relaxed his grip ever so slightly. And in that fraction of a second, Knave tore free, leaving a mouthful of hair and skin in his enemy's jaws.

The same motion that freed Knave also sent Lad stumbling forward. Knave saw his chance and took it. Flashing above his stumbling foe's head, Knave seized Lad from behind, just below the base of the skull. And holding him helpless, he began to grind his teeth in a slow, unstoping motion. Sooner or later he would chew down to the spinal cord and cut it in two.

Even as Lad thrashed about wildly, he felt there was no escape. He was nearly as powerless

in this position as is a puppy held up by the scruff of the neck. Without a sound, but still struggling as best he could, Lad awaited his fate. No longer was he growling or snarling. His patient, bloodshot eyes searched longingly for Lady. But they did not find her.

Until now, Lady had been meekly awaiting the outcome of the battle. But then she saw the terrible jaws, grinding away the life of her old flame. Moved by some impulse she did not try to resist, she jumped forward. Forgetting the pain in her swollen foot, she nipped Knave sharply in the hind leg. Then, as if embarrassed by her unfeminine behavior, she drew back in shame. But the work was done.

Through the red war-lust, Knave dimly realized that he had been attacked from behind. Perhaps this new opponent stood a chance of gaining a death hold upon him. He loosened his grip on Lad, and whizzed about to face the danger. But before Knave had half-completed his lightning whirl, Lad had him by the side of the throat.

Though it was extremely painful, this was no death grip. Yet it held its victim just as powerless as Knave's jaws had just now held Lad. Bearing down with all his weight and setting his fangs firmly, Lad slowly shoved Knave's head sideways to the ground and held

it there. Unable to break loose and in agony from Lad's grip on his throat, Knave lost his nerve.

The air vibrated with Knave's miserable howls of pain and fear. He was caught. He could not get away. Lad was hurting him terribly. And so he yelped like any cowardly mutt whose tail is stepped upon—rather than like a brave thoroughbred engaged in noble battle. The baggage man had been right about Knave's breeding.

After a while, beyond the fight haze, Lad saw a shadow in front of him, a shadow that soon became The Master. And Lad came to himself. He loosened his hold on Knave's throat, and stood up, groggily. Knave, still yelping, tucked his tail between his legs and fled for his life—and was gone forever from The Place, and from the story of Lad's life.

Stumbling, Lad slowly went up to The Master. The collie was gasping for breath, weak from exhaustion and loss of blood. Up to The Master he went, straight up to him. Not until he was barely two yards away did Lad see that The Master was holding something in his hand. It was that horrible, mischief-making eagle's head! Something was in the other hand—probably the dog whip. It did not matter much. Lad was ready for this final humiliation.

He would not try to dodge it, for now he'd twice broken The Law.

Suddenly The Master was kneeling beside him. The kind hand was stroking the dog's dizzy head. In a quivering tone, as if something were stuck in The Master's throat, the dear voice was saying remorsefully, "Oh Lad! Laddie! I'm so sorry. So sorry! You're—you're more of a man than I am, old friend. I'll make it up to you, somehow!"

And now, besides the loved hand, there was another touch, even more precious. It was a warmly caressing little pink tongue that licked his bleeding foreleg. Timidly, adoringly, Lady was trying to tend her hero's wounds.

"Lady, I apologize to you, too," went on the foolish Master. "I'm sorry, girl."

Lady was too busy soothing the hurts of her newly discovered mate to understand. But Lad understood. Lad always understood.