



The Dog in the Red Bandana, Ray Bradbury

## The Dog in the Red Bandana

The patient was in the hospital only three long sad days when on a Sunday, with all the doctors mostly absent and the nurses off doing something no one knew, that the remarkable thing happened.

He could hear the approach of the remarkable event moments before its arrival because of the explosions of laughter and the welcoming cries of patients far down the hall.

At long last the remarkable event arrived in the door.

A man stood there and on the end of a leash he held the most beautiful golden retriever that anyone had ever seen.

The retriever was incredibly handsome and well groomed and had a look of bright intelligence and wore around his neck a neatly tied bandana, the color of blood.

The dog had been making the rounds at the hospital and rumor had it that on those days when the dog arrived there was a great joy in all the corridors where he visited.

This seemed only natural and the patient often wondered why there were not more such dogs in the world to visit people and raise their spirits and perhaps make them well.

The dog in the blood-red bandana hesitated for a moment at the door, glanced in at the patient, and then padded in to stand by his bed for a moment, waiting to be petted.

Then, certain that the patient was feeling better, the dog turned, went back, and padded down the hall, greeted by glad cries and welcoming shouts.

It was, indeed, a remarkable event and the patient felt better immediately.

In the following days the patient found himself waiting with a peculiar impatience. He knew not for what, but suddenly realized he wanted the dog in the red bandana to return; it seemed more important than the arrivals and departures of the doctors and the irritable attention of the nurses.

In the next week, the dog visited only once.

In the week following, as the patient's illness persisted, the dog returned twice and the entire hospital seemed brighter and finer as a result of his visit.

In the third week, for some reason that was never explained, the dog in the red bandana came every day and walked through the halls with his bright scarf tied around his neck and with a look of complete sympathy and intelligence in his handsome face.

At the end of the first month, when the patient began to sense that he might be released any day, an even more remarkable thing happened:

Instead of the usual attendant who followed the dog, a man came through who was almost as remarkable as the dear beast.

This man was dressed in a simple khaki suit, but with a red tie around his neck. He was obviously blind, so indeed the dog had to be leading him.

This time, as before, the dog paused in the door and almost pointed to the patient who sat up and leaned forward, almost as if he expected the dog to speak.

Instead, the blind man began a conversation.

"Sir?" he said, guessing at the identity of the patient. "If someone were to ask you of all the beasts, in the sea, on the land, in the air, which of all these creatures is the most Christian?" The patient, thinking this was some sort of trick, tried to imagine and then replied, "Are you speaking of mankind?"

The blind man shook his head gently. "No. Excluding man, which creature is the most Christian?"

The patient studied the dog in the blood-red bandana, sitting in the door, again noticing his fine intelligence, and then said, "The answer is dogs."

The blind man nodded, quietly. "Exactly right. All other creatures live, but do not know that they live.

"Cats are special and fine and dearly loved, but they exist and do not truly know that they exist, as it is with all the other creatures of the air that fly, that soar, that circle the earth, and all the field beasts who live but do not know their existence.

"All about these creatures of the field and the inhabitants of the sea and air, death occurs, but they do not know death and they do not grieve.

"But dogs not only know what life is, but sense and consider death." The patient nodded, for he knew this to be true. He remembered the death of a friend where his dog had grieved long after the friend was gone, and the dog wandered about the house, crying mournfully, and dwindled away to darkness.

The patient said, "The more I think on this, the more remarkable are dogs."

The blind man raised his eyes to the ceiling and said, "And if dogs should appear at the gates of Heaven, would they be admitted?"

"Immediately!" cried the patient and laughed at his quick response. "For they are without sin. Mankind would line up behind them to beg for entrance. The dogs would instantly run to stand by Saint Peter and help admit the sinful beast called man.

"So, to answer your question, of all the creatures in the world who are most Christian, forgiving, and most loving, dogs can be named with Abu Ben Adam, lead all the rest."

The blind man agreed.

“Strike your cat and you’ve lost a friend. Hit your dog, which I hope you will never do, but nevertheless if you strike him just once in a lifetime he will stare at you with his tender eyes and say, ‘What’s wrong? What was that all about? Don’t you know that I love you and forgive you?’ And then he will turn first one cheek and then the other and will go on loving you forever. That is what a dog is.”

During all this, the dog in the blood-red bandana sat by the blind man, looking at the patient with the most tender and beautiful stare he had ever seen. Listening, the dog did neither acknowledge the compliments nor ignore them, but sat quietly in the midst of his beauty.

Finally, when the dog felt that the blind man had said his say, the dog wandered off into the corridors of the hospital, and welcoming cries and laughter could be heard.

In the following days rumors spread through the hospital that an amazing number of people were heading home; people who had lived there for weeks, or sometimes months, suddenly packed up and left, to the curiosity and amazement of the doctors and to the whispering wonder of the nurses. Patient after patient departed and the number of really sick people in the hospital diminished, and the number of deaths reported, or rumored, sank down to almost zero.

During the fourth week, lying in bed one night, the patient felt a sharp pain in his right wrist and took some aspirin, but the pain did not go away.

During the night he half-wakened because he felt someone sit on the bed beside him, but he could not be sure of that.

Half drowsy, he sensed a kind of breathing near him and then heard a strange sound that reminded him of a summer night when he was a child.

How beautiful it had been at three in the morning, with the moonlight streaming in through the panes of the window, to hear a beautiful far sound from the kitchen where the icebox stood.

In the drip-pan under the icebox cold water from the blocks of ice was trapped below and at three in the morning there was a soft sound of lapping; the family dog, thirsty, had half-crawled under the icebox and was drinking the cool clear waters from the fallen ice.

To lie quietly in bed, listening to that beautiful far sound, was one of the most touching experiences in his life.

In the middle of remembering or half-dreaming the sound of the lapping of ice water, the patient thought he felt something move on his wrist.

It was much like the brief licking of a tongue moving to catch the ice water on that summer night long ago.

Then he fell asleep.

When he woke in the morning, the pain in his wrist was gone.

In the following days the dog with the blood-red bandana wandered at will through the hospital, this time alone; the blind man was long since gone.

The dog seemed to know where it was going and came often into the patient's room and gazed upon him very quietly for long periods of time.

They conversed in their minds; the dog seemed to understand everything the patient wished to say, even though he never spoke.

The dog then wandered off through the hospital and in the days to come the sounds of laughter, the shouts, the cries welcoming him, diminished until it seemed that the hospital was growing empty. Not only did the doctors cease visiting on Sundays, or golf Wednesdays, but they seemed not to arrive on Tuesdays or Thursdays and, finally, hardly at all on Fridays.

The echoes in the corridors grew loud and the sounds of breathing from the far rooms ceased.

On a final day the patient, feeling alert and sensing that at any moment he might arise and don his clothes without the advice of doctors and then head home, sat up in bed and called to the high corridors, "Hello! Anyone there?"

A long silence from the quiet hospital rooms. Again he cried, "Anyone there? Hello!" There were only echoes from the halls and all the avenues throughout the entire building stood still.

Very quietly, the patient began to dress in preparation to leave.

Finally, at three in the afternoon, the handsome dog with the blood-red bandana came padding by in the silent corridor and stood by the door.

The patient said, "Come in."

The dog entered and stood by the bed.

"Sit," said the patient.

The dog sat and gazed at him with great luminous eyes, a tender expression, a half-smile on his mouth.

Finally the patient said, "What is your name?"

The dog studied him with his great luminous eyes.

His mouth moved just the merest touch and a whisper came forth:

"Jesus," said the dog. "That is my name. Jesus. What is yours?"

The End