

He Was My Friend

by
BASIL RATHBONE

THIS IS A TRIBUTE to the memory of Moritz von Niklotsburg, who was a gentleman. He was graceful, loyal and an individualist. Today he must be enjoying the progress he has earned in the great scheme of things as they are, and have been, and always will be. For what wrongs he committed, he suffered. For what good he did, he was rewarded. He lived and died with his great pride intact. And for the time he was with us, he gave us such devotion that his passing left a streak of bleakness across our days.

Moritz was my very dear friend, my close companion, the silent sharer of my hopes, disappointments and triumphs.



He bore the imposing name of Moritz von Niklotsburg, but he had the simple heart of a mongrel and the eyes of a faithful friend

A finer dog never lived.

I was touring in the play, *The Swan*, when we met. I'm afraid my wife and I aided and abetted a fugitive from justice when we acquired him. Moritz had killed a sheep and was to be tried for murder. His distracted master, a close friend of mine, wanted him to be "lost." Understanding and remorseful, Moritz indicated his liking for my wife and me. And I took to him immediately. My wife bought him for my Christmas present and Moritz was then literally lost to his former master.

From the first, Moritz seemed to realize that we had saved his life—certainly his life belonged to us.

His Constant Companion

Companions of all kinds I have had—but none like Moritz. He traveled with me—through long tours—sleeping at the foot of my bed, accompanying me to the theatre. He would lie quietly in my



Basil Rathbone, above, tells the story of a dog's devotion in this unusual article written expressly for **HOLLYWOOD Magazine**

dressing room before and after every performance.

During each performance he would sit in the wings, prick up his ears whenever I spoke on the stage. Between acts, he would sit outside my door. When the final curtain descended, he would listen to the applause, rise, stretch himself, arch his back as he greeted me, and scamper to the dressing room in eager anticipation of our "after the show" walk and supper. For eight years he never missed a performance—nor did his behavior vary.

He had his own adventures, of course. In San Francisco one of them frightened us all. Walking in the hills, Moritz suddenly disappeared. We called and called. We searched everywhere. Finally, tired and worried, we came upon him lying in a canyon. Foam oozed from his mouth. Horrified, I rushed toward him.

A few paces before reaching him, I was impelled to stop. An indescribable odor stopped me as completely as though a wall had arisen before me. Moritz had banded words with a skunk and his adversary had spat full into his aristocratic face! After a while, the humiliation almost unbearable, he followed us home. Keeping his distance with chagrin and understanding. We did nothing to remind him of the incident, except that whenever grave disciplinary measures were needed, we looked at him and said firmly, "Oh, you skunk!"

In 1927, I left our home at Great Neck one Monday morning for a hurried play conference with the late Hartley Manners. I returned on Wednesday evening to find Moritz alone, awaiting me at the station. What a welcome he gave me! As long as I live, that welcome will remain one of the most beautiful of my memories.

A Dog Who Loved Music

During the days I had been away, my faithful friend had refused both food and drink and lay disconsolate through the hours of my absence. With

the great, inexplicable intuition of his kind, he had suddenly arisen in intense excitement, pawed demandingly at the door, and raced from the house—to arrive, panting, at the station as my train came in!

He made friends with my friends. He was included in our invitations. Cosmo Hamilton, Mr. and Mrs. Julius Paul Meyers, John Charles Thomas always invited him with us—always treated him as a person.

He loved music. Motionless, intent, he would sit beneath the piano, listening to the playing of Harold Bauer, Harold Samuel, Alfred Blumer and Victor Wittgenstein. Great favorites of his were Felix Salmond and the London String Quartet. His treasured friend was Fritz Kreisler, who understood him and loved him.

We had an apartment in 1928 that Moritz loved dearly—or rather he loved



This simple marker is man's testimony to a dog's immortality. Moritz, who lived an honorable life, was buried with due honors

the kitchen of the apartment. There was one solitary mouse in this kitchen that Moritz would wait whole days and nights for. At maddening intervals the mouse would appear and would face Moritz temptingly. Moritz on these occasions, seemed paralyzed with excitement. He wouldn't or couldn't move.

Eventually the mouse would scamper across the kitchen. A big black paw would miss him by a yard. Moritz would rise, hunt wildly and then sit down again, with incredible patience to await again the ever elusive visitor. Anywhere, at any time, all one had to say was, "Where's the mousie," and Moritz would dash for home and kitchen! He never caught the mouse, but he had a glorious time thinking about it! So did the mouse!!

He was a strong, enthusiastic swimmer. Courageous, too. While he enjoyed a swim in the pool—his real enthusiasm was

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He Was My Friend
(Continued from page twenty-nine)



Basil Rathbone does his greatest screen rôle to date in M.G.M.'s version of *Romeo and Juliet*. You'll find him one of the outstanding stars in the film

the ocean. There he would conquer the waves or take a beating from them. His vigor demanded the stimulation of that elemental contest. He was beauty in action, then. And when he ran for exercise, he had tremendous speed—hair flying—eyes alight with the thrill of motion—the precision of his gait was lovely to see.

Twilight Comes to Moritz

Heartbreaking, that's what it was, when that joyous activity was crushed by an infection in one of his legs. A stubborn infection for which we decided to have an operation performed. With pain clouding the brightness of his great eyes, but resignation in his every movement, he suffered himself to be lifted upon the operating table, calmly stretched the offending leg toward the veterinarian, and turned his head toward the wall.

For two hours the dangerous and painful surgery went on—and Moritz did not flinch. For two months afterward he lay in the Park Veterinary. His life despaired of time and again, the great fighting heart of him refused to be defeated. Tenderly nursed by "Miss O'D," head nurse, and expertly treated by Dr. Cohen, his valiant resistance won, and we sailed for England.

There the laws of the country separated us for six months. The English Rabies Law requires quarantine for that length of time. He was given, as are all dogs thus held, expert care. I made the trip from London to South Croydon three times a week. Again, his understanding was as clear as though words were his medium of expression, and in December he was home again. Once more he slept beside my bed. Once more we walked and played together. But not for long. His leg began troubling him again. Gone were his days of action. He was very lame when we returned to New York the following October.

There was nothing to be done for him. It was with heavy hearts that we watched him limp beside us as we took our walks more slowly to accommodate his pain-filled stride. He begged to go on tour when I left for the coast with Katherine Cornell's Repertory Company. Tiring as

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AT THE CLOTHES SHE MUST WEAR

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I knew the tour would be—I also knew Moritz' days were numbered, and agreed with him that we should spend that time together. He suffered without complaint. As a matter of fact, good actor that he was, he would often try to put on a show of strength for us. Pathetic performances which he could never finish—pathetic, silent pleas against what he knew was inevitable.

It was his last tour.

On to Another Land

I went on alone in the fall, leaving Moritz to the gentle ministrations of "Miss O'D." Two days later, "Miss O'D" called me in New Haven and told me to come at once. I took an early morning train from Providence to New York and spent nearly three hours with my beloved friend. Then rushed back to my performance.

I did not see him again. He died in his sleep that night.

We buried him with honor. No more poignant grief could have attended the passing of any friend I've ever had. We buried him beneath an old tree on a hillside he had loved to roam. His casket was lined with silk and all about his last resting place were flowers from his friends. Those friends were legion. Fit reward for him who had been so true a friend himself.

He lived beautifully. Gave beautifully of loyalty and devotion. His memory gives us beauty even now.

Come winter time and summer time,
Come sweet and cleansing rain,
Come spring time and the autumn,
Both sun and moon shall wane!
Come seed time and flowering,
And harvesting the grain,
The Earth will cease and time grow old,
But we shall meet again.

'Twas not for naught we walked the fields,
The sidewalks and the lanes;
Sharing our hopes, our fears, our doubts,
Beliefs, our joys and pains.
And though I, with human weakness,
Have not always understood,
You, with your dog devotion,
Blindly believed me good.

Now you will sleep a little while,
And dream in peace, please God
Then one day I shall follow you
And sleep, too, beneath the sod—
To rise with you and walk again,
With a vague sense of remembering
That we had loved in other lives,
Before this new ascending.

—BASIL RATHBONE



Ketti Gallian, who began her career with the old Fox studios, is now emoting for Paramount, looking prettier than ever

Pretty young student...
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FRANCES NALLE, Search for Talent winner, chats with ROBERT TAYLOR in Hollywood



HENRY FONDA and MARY BRIAN as they appear in "Spendthrift," the current Walter Wanger hit production

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