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Saving a Tail

Mary Graham Bonner

Evelyn came running to meet Jack the moment he came out of school.

"Something's wrong with Marian," she said. "She wouldn't walk home with me. Said she had something to do. She was so strange about it I couldn't be cross with her, but I don't understand at all."

"Jock was the same with me," said Jack. "Come on."

They ran most of the five blocks to their cousins' house and arrived breathless. Jack was halfway down the hall when he nearly collided with Jock coming up from the cellar, carrying something small and white and wriggling.

Buster — the little fox terrier puppy Marian had bought with her birthday money — blinked up at them with bright eyes. He was white with one brown ear and one black ear and two black spots on his back, and only a week old as a member of the family.

"What happened to him?" Jack demanded.

"Nothing happened," said Jock. "And it's none of your business."



Marian appeared behind him. "We're going to have his tail cut," she said. "Fox terriers look foolish with long tails. Everyone says so. He'll be perfectly well in a week."

Evelyn's eyes went wide. Then she burst into tears.

Jack's jaw tightened. "For the sake of how he looks," he said, very quietly, "you would let that puppy hurt for a week. He has never done anything to you. He's completely in your care. And you would let him suffer for style."

"The bones are soft," Marian murmured. "It doesn't really—"

"How do you know what it feels like?" said Jack. "Would you like me to cut off part of your arm and tell you the bones are soft?"

It was very blunt. But he meant it, and Marian and Jock could see that he did.

They were not cruel children, as it turned out — only uninformed ones. When Jack and Evelyn told them plainly what tail-docking actually meant, what it actually cost the puppy in pain, Jock and Marian looked at Buster, and then at each other.

"We didn't know," said Marian.

"We really didn't," said Jock.

They were both glad they'd found out in time.

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