

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/1

*Susan Anmuth*  
**Sketches of Tatiana**

**T**his is what I did for Tatiana before seven AM today. I gave her amoxicillin for a tummy bacterial infection. I squirted 1.5 mg of benezepril down her reluctant throat. Benezepril is a high blood pressure medication used to manage chronic renal disease. One mg of famotidine followed the benezepril. Famotidine is really pepcid, and helps prevent the ulcers that can develop because kidney failure causes urea to accumulate in the blood.

Then I crushed one-quarter pill of an appetite enhancer, mirtazapine, sprinkling the white dust into baby chicken food on top of Tati's regular prescribed kidney-sensitive food, which currently she's not eating. Hence the appetite enhancer. (I wash my hands thoroughly because I need the opposite of an appetite enhancer.) I put a Cyclosporine Ophthalmic drop into each eye since she doesn't produce enough moisture, especially in her left. And I also mixed into the baby food a crumbled half tablet of joint medicine which I give her every other day.

Tonight she'll get only the antibiotic and an extra dose of pepcid. I'm supposed to do her eyes twice a day but I haven't. The vet said she can live with a consistent once a day. She the vet, that is. I think why it's hard to maintain twice a day eye drops is that Tati has cataracts and can hardly see anyway. She is, after all, 91 years old in people years. So I compromise between duty and a feeling of profound uselessness.

Tati is a Yorkshire terrier weighing in at a hearty five point seven pounds. When we met three years ago, she was three point one. The gain is a testament to our life together. Tatiana's face exudes personality, alertness, sass. Even asleep, foxy nose buried in tough little neck, her sensitive Yoda ears remain on call. She often resembles a mop, because I prefer the shaggy look to the drowned rat appearance that grooming uncovers. Luckily, her tan and silver hair grows fast. Hair, not fur, which is what makes Tati hypoallergenic. I emphasize this selling point to campground and hotel owners reluctant to allow her access.

Giving Tati her medicine is infinitely easier than medicating my cat. Jelly is ten times smarter than I am, discerns when I'm approaching with a syringe almost before I know it myself, and insinuates herself behind laden bookcases that are smack against the wall and can't be budged without emptying. She has staying power too. Hours, days if necessary. Whereas Tati isn't happy about the meds, but even when she shimmies into a good hiding place, if I don't follow she gets curious and comes looking for me in approximately thirty seconds.

In fact, she is always thrilled to see me, dancing on hind legs in her circus dog persona, wiggling all over, turning her body so I'll deliver her favorite butt rub. She greets each day with a happy bow, hip hopping from the pillow we've shared all night with my cheek pressing her flank. We sing-song about the day ahead: "Good morning, my little bunny. I wish I didn't have to go to work today." When I'm slow providing breakfast, Tati lifts an appealing paw and flicks her tongue to explain how hungry she is.

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Anticipating which room I'm heading into, she sashays in front, glancing over her shoulder. She thinks she knows, but is flexible enough to change course when she's wrong, as if room B were the destination all along. Never does she hold a grudge – again, unlike the cat, not to mention humans. Tatiana trusts me to protect her in all adverse circumstances, including when I am to blame for those circumstances.

This is what my dog does for me:

She devotes herself to me above all others and will until she dies, or I do.

Isn't that enough? In my life it's unique. I wasn't any parent's favorite child. The friends who love me love others as well. My stormy relationships with men are a) never permanent – though one lasted nineteen years; and b) stormy. And my most important person, my son, has his own life.

But I *am* my dog's life.

Tatiana is completely my girl, yet is sweet and socialable. Taking her for a walk is an exercise in vicarious ahhhhhh's. She reaps plenty of attention on the street from kids and old men on park benches and couples walking hand in hand. Sometimes when a cute guy says, "How cute!" I respond, "Thanks! And my dog is too, right?" I tell giggling toddlers they may pet her, gently. When they do I say, "She likes you! She likes how gentle you are." Their mothers thank me in Portuguese, the language of choice in my section of Newark, New Jersey.

Tati's not a dog's dog. She never learned how to play. In princess-like manner she disdains dogs that jostle around sniffing that anal gland I recently read is as individual as a fingerprint. It's only when a dog displays no interest that Tatiana wants to touch noses.

Unlike the stereotype, my dog and I don't look alike, but we share certain traits. For instance, Tatiana's sense of direction is as challenged as my own. Since she can't quite see through

the cataracts, when we're at someone's house she snuffles a lot of people as she looks for me. Our short-term memories are also similar. She often forgets where I was when she checked five minutes before.

What I love about Tati's tail is its honesty. It's a straight up little stump when she's happily exploring my friend Irene's big yard. Also while protecting me with deep barks and quivering body against those scary toll collectors on the New Jersey turnpike. (Yes, yes, I keep forgetting to get EZPass, and Tatiana's one imperfection is her failure to remind me.) But when she's anxious that my flinging clothes into a suitcase might mean abandonment, the tail flags. She never pretends cheer.

Tatiana is very precise about her wishes. While I'm driving she stretches out on my lap. If I happen to stroke her and she's not in the mood, she stands up, gives me a look, and hops to the passenger seat. After a moment she gives me another look to emphasize that sleeping on me is one thing, but kindly keep my hands on the wheel. Then she hops back and drapes over me again.

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When I got her three years ago, she was not a lap dog. Nestling near me on the sofa was close enough for Tatiana. But once she got used to a soft thigh cushion, she began demanding it. Her preference is for me to stretch my legs straight onto the coffee table so my lap is smooth. I've had to eschew an old habit of crossing my ankles.

I delight in my dog's being alpha. On walks, the leash will suddenly tug as if I've landed a 50 pound trout. I'll look down to see Tatiana looking up, patiently explaining, "This is where we stop to sniff and pee. Didn't you know that?" I love that she thinks I know everything.

Tatiana and Jelly are frenemies. The cat is justifiably jealous. She used to be an only pet. I can identify, being the oldest sibling in my family, but can't help being madly in love with my dog. I tell Jelly I love her too, but she isn't fooled. She knows there's no comparison. In compensation, she's become the Einstein of cats: every waking moment she spends thinking up new ways to torture Tatiana. She may dream of it too. Her methods are quite successful. While the dog is peacefully drinking water, Jelly sneaks up and nips her on the hind leg. While Tati is curled into one of five thousand pet beds scattered around the apartment, the cat pushes her out to take over that particular bed, overflowing its sides and grinning an evil pussycat grin. By now Tatiana won't make the journey from kitchen to living room without whimpering for human escort to avoid being pounced on.

The only thing Tatiana protects from Jelly is her food. Thus the cat plays a good role in encouraging my little five-pounder to eat.

I wish I were as adorable as my dog. I'll go further: In some ways I'd like to be my dog, and I wish other people were too. The sense in which this is most true, besides of course her eternal loyalty, is that Tatiana judges not by appearance. In fact, dogs are clueless about frivolities like relative size, color, breed. None of it matters. Why is it we humans are so focused on whether a calf is nicely rounded, a waist is willowy, or a man's shoulders are broad? Really, what does it matter?

I'm quite sure Tatiana was never abused. My picture of how she was given up is this: her owner, a middle-aged woman, couldn't afford the veterinary care and with tears wanted to do best by her dog. The intake worker at the shelter told me that a woman came in clutching the dog to her,

said she'd found her on the street, and asked if after the veterinary hospital took care of her if she would be able to adopt her.

I wish the intake person had asked the woman what she called the dog. The pound named her Tatiana, and estimated her age as ten years old. Her mammary glands were loaded with tumors, one particularly gross one four inches long. Tatiana had no teeth. Her jaw was fractured in several places. When I learned this I was horrified, but it's a natural condition of very small dogs that lose their teeth. The jaw structure often doesn't hold. The most obvious effect of this is that Tatiana's tongue hangs out. This makes her even more adorable.

I worked in the Finance Department of a major New York City animal welfare organization.. I'd been complaining that all the dogs in the shelter

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were big, mostly pit bulls, and I wanted a small dog. A vet who overheard mentioned that a Yorkshire terrier had just been brought in and wasn't on the radar yet. I called, emailed, and called again to put an immediate hold, as an employee, on the Yorkie.

Good thing I did. Everyone wanted her.

The hold I put on Tatiana, sight unseen, was a medical foster hold. That meant that the shelter would pay for her care, I would nurse her when she was released, and then adopt her or bring her back ready for adoption. The trustee who organized the most lucrative annual fundraiser for the organization happened to pass through the shelter and spied my Tatiana. She said, "Wait! This is exactly what I need to be my bicoastal dog! Small enough to fly with me between homes in Long Island and Los Angeles!" She wanted to adopt her immediately, paying all the medical costs.

I was under heavy pressure to give Tatiana up. But fuggedaboutit. I generously offered to bring my dog to this woman's mansion for play dates, and explained she could still pay all the vet bills.

That turned out not to be her interest.

Meanwhile. I visited Tatiana. She was as indifferent to human contact as any deeply depressed creature could be. She was too despondent to eat. If I hadn't seen her surrounded by dog food I'd swear they were starving her. The only time her ears pricked up was when another dog barked. I visited her again. It was no better. I thought, what did I get myself into? I want a dog for the love. I asked the animal behaviorist, Trish, to whom Tati was also indifferent, if she thought this dog would ever be able to bond with anyone. Maybe, Trish said.

The day came for Tatiana's release. A radical mastectomy had eradicated the tumors, both malignant and benign. She was on antibiotics for a urinary infection.

I was terrified. I typed out a list of questions, including how much and what kind of food to feed her, how to avoid breaking her little legs, when her next checkup should be scheduled. The adoption vet technician, Lindsey, was both patient and pointed about my hysteria. Her most useful advice was, "Don't beg her to eat. If she doesn't after half an hour, throw the food away. Put more out next meal time."

It was raining that night, typical early November gloom. Getting Tatiana home, in a camouflage-spotted carrier donated by a friend in Adoptions, involved bus, subway, New Jersey transit, and one more bus. On every mode of transportation I crooned songs I'd sung to my son

twenty years ago, keeping the carrier unzipped and caressing her little head. "I love you, a bushel and a peck. I love you with a hug around the neck. I... LOVE ... YOU." This being New York, no other passenger lifted an eyebrow. Neither did Tatiana.

The last part of the trip from Far Upper East Side New York to Ironbound Newark meant walking a few rainy blocks from the bus stop and up two flights of stairs. "We're hooommee, sweetie," I informed Tatiana, expecting her to hide for hours; I was bracing myself to leave her

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alone. I carefully put the carrier down, allowing Jelly to sniff it. I carefully opened one end. Tatiana slid out, took a long, luxurious stretch and a long, luxurious pee right on the spot. Tail up, she marched around inspecting her new home. This was too much for Jelly, who chased the interloper. Tati came straight to me.

From that moment on, she was my dog.