

## Stolen Friendship

A

Mark Tyler was grateful for the shelter of his nephew's home, and he tried to show his gratitude. He liked to be outdoors, and so he kept the flower beds in meticulous order, even though kneeling was difficult and getting up was even more so. And when Lucy, his nephew's wife, stayed late at her clubs or charity committee meetings, Mark would have the table set and dinner half going. At such times Lucy would rush in breathlessly and say, "Uncle Mark, you're a darling!" All evening the glow of her words would warm his heart.

B

He was old and his hair was silver-gray, but his eyes were still an unfaded blue in his sun-bronzed face, and his understanding was keen and intuitive. He respected Lucy's wish to have every chair and vase just so, every flower and shrub tended properly. John and Lucy had no children, but they were constantly busy with business and social activities. This Mark knew, was an unconscious effort to fill in the empty spot in their lives. He was well aware that their hearts were big, or they'd never have taken him into their home. So he was shyly eager to please, humbly happy when they took note of him, careful not to intrude in their lives. And he was lonely.

C

That was how he came to know the setter. It was white, its body flecked lightly with brown, and its legs and tail beautifully feathered. It belonged to the Wilsons, who had recently moved into the colonial house directly across the street. In the daytime, the setter waited through the long hours with brooding, forlorn patience, but when the two small Wilson children came home from school in the afternoon, he burst into life with a frenzy of joyous activity, waving his tail like a plume. In the evenings, after the children had gone to bed, he lay quietly outside the door, lifting his head eagerly when someone came out, lowering it dejectedly when the person paid him no heed. Old Mark observed all this as he took the walks that were one of his small forms of pleasure, or when he worked in the yard. "The dog's lonesome. same as me," he would say to himself, and each day he would pause in front of the Wilson house and speak softly to the dog. The setter would lift his head in careful contemplation, his eyes wary. Once when Mark stopped, the setter crept toward him, then suddenly turned and went back to the house.

D

In time, Mark learned that the children called the dog Ricky. And since he had never seen the setter enjoying a bone, he made it a point one day to ask Mrs. Wilson whether she minded if he occasionally brought one to Ricky. "Heavens, no!" she said "I'm afraid the children are the only ones who pay much attention to him. We wouldn't bother with a dog if it weren't for them." When she had gone back into the house, Mark unwrapped the bone he had brought. "You'll like this, fellow," he said gently. He laid the bone on the grass and went back across the street to work in the flower beds. The following day, when Mark Tyler went over, the setter came closer. Then, finally, the day arrived when he carefully took a bone from Mark's hand. Still another day, when there was no bone, he let Mark touch his head briefly. As time went by, the

setter began watching for Mark, his tail wagging, his eyes expectant. Slowly, shyly, they grew to know each other keeping a reserved distance as gentlemen should.

E

One morning as Mark set forth on his walk, he found Ricky close behind him. Unsure of his welcome, the dog waited. Then as Mark spoke to him, Ricky began running ahead happily scouting the bushes. After that, they shared a daily excursion. Eventually, the setter began coming into the yard when Mark was working in the garden. His approaches were always tentative, as if he had often been repulsed; his amber eyes would search Mark's deeply as he waited for a friendly pat. Then, as if his joy could not be contained, he would race in mad circles until Mark coaxed him into quietness. One day as Mark patted him, the dog lifted one side of his mouth in a painful sort of grimace. "By jingo!" Mark said, laughing, "I'd swear you're smiling at me." Little by little the bond strengthened between the old man and the dog. Each was considerate of the other. Ricky, careful of the Tyler grounds, waited cautiously to join Mark. And Mark, now that the bond of friendship and respect had been established, never called to him: Ricky had a right to give of himself as he chose.

F

Their friendship grew inevitably into love. Ricky's amber eyes lighted up, when Mark came outdoors. He waved his tail madly or tugged at Mark's pants or rolled over and over in an ecstasy of joy. As for Mark, without his quite realizing it, his days took on new life and meaning. Ricky came often at night no seeming to know the times when Mark was alone, just as he knew Mark's room—the one with the small porch adjoining, which gave Mark a private entrance to the house. The setter would lie on the mat in front of the door—or stand waiting until Mark became aware of him. He was aware that he wouldn't be invited to come inside, but if Mark came out and spoke soft, loving words to him, Ricky went home content. The love that Ricky gave to Mark was completely apart from the love he gave to the Wilson children. It was the love of a dog for his master, a master who spoke gentle words to him, gave him a bone now and then, took him for walks, and waited tolerantly while he made explorations or foolishly chased a low flying bird.

G

It had never occurred to Mark that Ricky might be taken away from him. The news came with stunning suddenness. First, word spread through the neighborhood that the Wilsons were moving to the country. Next, their house was sold: and then, one bleak day, the moving van came. The void in Mark's life those first few days was almost unbearable. "Uncle Mark, you're doing too much," Lucy told him as he worked ceaselessly at one small task after another. "Have to keep limber," he said, smiling. He didn't talk about Ricky's being gone. He didn't say that a man eighty years old learns to live with pain and disappointment. He said very little at all, and, after a few days, he began taking walks again alone.

H

It was on a night about two weeks later - an evening when Lucy and John were out - that he heard it, the soft scratching at his door. He waited, his heart pounding, not daring to believe his ears. Then the soft, familiar scratching came again, and with a sudden trembling joy he went to the door and opened it. Ricky was weary and travel-worn, but his amber eyes were alight. And as Mark looked at him, he lifted one side of his mouth in the eager, homely smile. "You didn't forget!" Mark whispered. "You've come back - come back to me." But he knew this was not right. Though his hands ached to pat the setter's head, he held back. One rapturous welcome from him and Ricky would be a tramp. The two of them could be friends, sharing loneliness,

while the setter lived close by: but now his rightful home was miles away, and a dog so divided in allegiance was no dog at all. Perhaps he understood Ricky better than the Wilsons did, Mark thought, but the Wilson children loved the dog.

I.

Mark forced himself to remember Billy Wilson with his arms about Ricky, forced himself to think of Ricky hunting quail and pheasant on forest trails, and romping in wide-open fields amid the excitement of country sounds and smells. As the dog whined softly and drew closer to Mark, the old man's heart was torn between joy and anguish. He drew back from the door and closed it. After a few moments he went to the telephone. "I guess he missed your old house," he said, when he had Mrs. Wilson on the wire, "I thought I'd call before you worried." When Mr. Wilson arrived, Ricky still lay outside Mark's door, his eyes bewildered. "What'll I do?" Mr. Wilson said gruffly to the dog. "Tie you up out there in the country?"

J

Except to say good morning and good evening, Mark had never talked to Mr. Wilson before. Now he said, "That's a fine dog. I know you got him for your children, but part of him needs you too, if you don't mind an old man telling you this." He paused a moment, embarrassed, and then went on: "Talk to him. Let him lie by your fire at night. Walk through the woods with him. Take him hunting. Get to know him, and you'll never regret it. Two children, country freedom, a man for steadiness - that's heaven for a dog." Mr. Wilson listened. He had obviously been angry at having to make the long trip into town, but as he gazed at Mark and then down at the waiting dog, his expression changed. "I think you're right, Mr. Tyler," he said. "I ... hadn't thought about that." He reached down and stroked the setter's head. "Well, old fellow, how about going home?" he said. Ricky hesitated and then looked up at Mark, his eyes uncertain. With a hollow sense of loss, Mark knew it was over: he'd never see the setter again. "Go home. Ricky," he said with quiet authority. "Go home, boy."

### New Words & Phrases

A

- **Grateful** – thankful.
- **Shelter** – protection or a safe place to stay.
- **Gratitude** – the feeling of being thankful.
- **Meticulous order** – very neat and careful arrangement.
- **Kneeling** – being on one's knees.
- **Breathlessly** – while breathing quickly, usually because of hurry or excitement.
- **Darling** – a loving or affectionate way of addressing someone.
- **Glow of her words** – warm, happy feeling caused by her kind words.
- **Warm his heart** – make him feel happy and loved.

B

- **Silver-gray hair** – gray hair showing old age.
- **Unfaded blue** – still bright, not dull or faded.
- **Sun-bronzed face** – face darkened or tanned by the sun.
- **Keen and intuitive** – sharp and understanding things easily without explanation.
- **Every chair and vase just so** – everything placed perfectly as she liked.
- **Shrub** – small bush.
- **Fill in the empty spot in their lives** – do things to forget the sadness of having no children.

- **Big hearts** – kind and generous people.
- **Eager to please** – wanting very much to make others happy.
- **Took note of him** – noticed or paid attention to him.
- **Intrude** – enter someone’s life or space without being wanted.
- **Lonely** – feeling alone or without companionship.

## C

- **Setter** – a type of hunting dog (here, a pet).
- **Flecked lightly** – marked with small spots or patches.
- **Feathered tail** – tail covered with long, soft fur or hair.
- **Colonial house** – a traditional, old-style house with classic design.
- **Brooding, forlorn patience** – sad, lonely waiting.
- **Burst into life** – suddenly became lively and active.
- **Frenzy of joyous activity** – wild and happy movement.
- **Plume** – feather or something waving like a feather.
- **Dejectedly** – sadly and without hope.
- **Paid him no heed** – did not pay attention to him.
- **Small forms of pleasure** – little things that made him happy.
- **Lonesome** – another word for lonely.
- **Contemplation** – deep thought or careful looking.
- **Wary** – cautious; careful because of fear or distrust.
- **Crept toward** – moved slowly and quietly closer.

## D

- **Setter enjoying a bone** – dog chewing a bone for pleasure.
- **Made it a point** – decided it was important to do something.
- **Heavens, no!** – strong way of saying “Of course not!”
- **Pay much attention to** – show much care or interest in.
- **Unwrapped** – removed the covering.
- **You’ll like this, fellow** – friendly way of addressing the dog.
- **Expectant** – waiting hopefully.
- **Reserved distance** – respectful space, not too close.
- **As gentlemen should** – in a polite, proper way.

## E

- **Set forth** – started out; began to go somewhere.
- **Unsure of his welcome** – not knowing if he was accepted.
- **Scouting the bushes** – searching or exploring around the plants.
- **Excursion** – a short trip or outing.
- **Tentative approaches** – hesitant, careful attempts to come close.
- **Repulsed** – pushed away or rejected.
- **Amber eyes** – golden-brown colored eyes.
- **Pat** – gentle touch with the hand.
- **Grimace** – twisted expression showing pain.
- **By jingo!** – an old-fashioned exclamation of surprise.
- **Bond** – close emotional connection.
- **Considerate** – thoughtful, caring about the other’s feelings.
- **Cautiously** – carefully, without taking risks.
- **Right to give of himself as he chose** – freedom to show affection when he wanted.

## F

- **Inevitably** – unavoidably; certain to happen.
- **Lighted up** – became bright with happiness.
- **Ecstasy of joy** – great, overwhelming happiness.
- **Took on new life and meaning** – became full of purpose and happiness again.
- **Adjoining** – next to or connected to.
- **Private entrance** – a door that only he used.
- **Content** – satisfied and peaceful.
- **Apart from** – separate from; different from.
- **Tolerantly** – patiently accepting small faults.
- **Explorations** – searching or investigating new things.
- **Low flying bird** – bird close to the ground (that the dog chased playfully).

## G

- **Occurred to** – came into the mind.
- **Stunning suddenness** – shocking quickness.
- **Bleak day** – cold, sad, or depressing day.
- **Void** – empty space or feeling of emptiness.
- **Unbearable** – too painful to stand.
- **Ceaselessly** – without stopping.
- **Limber** – flexible; able to move easily.
- **Learn to live with pain and disappointment** – get used to unhappiness as part of life.

## H

- **Soft scratching** – gentle sound made by claws or fingers rubbing on a surface.
- **Heart pounding** – heart beating quickly because of excitement or fear.
- **Trembling joy** – shaking with happiness.
- **Weary** – tired.
- **Travel-worn** – showing signs of having traveled far.
- **Alight** – bright with emotion.
- **Homely smile** – plain but sincere and warm smile.
- **Rapturous welcome** – very happy greeting.
- **Tramp** – stray or homeless dog.
- **Divided in allegiance** – loyal to two sides at once.
- **Rightful home** – the proper or true home.

## I

- **Quail and pheasant** – kinds of birds hunted in the countryside.
- **Romping** – running and playing actively.
- **Amid** – in the middle of.
- **Anguish** – severe emotional pain.
- **Torn between joy and anguish** – feeling both happiness and deep sadness.
- **Drew back** – stepped away or withdrew.
- **On the wire** – on the telephone line.
- **Bewildered** – confused, not understanding what's happening.
- **Gruffly** – in a rough or unfriendly tone.
- **Tie you up** – fasten with a rope.

## J

- **Except to say good morning and good evening** – meaning he never had long conversations with him before.
- **If you don't mind an old man telling you this** – polite, humble way of giving advice.
- **Embarrassed** – shy or uncomfortable.
- **Steadiness** – dependability, calm strength.
- **Heaven for a dog** – perfect life for a dog.
- **Obviously** – clearly, without doubt.
- **Expression changed** – his facial look showed new feelings.
- **Hesitated** – paused, uncertain what to do.
- **Hollow sense of loss** – deep, empty sadness.
- **Quiet authority** – calm but firm command.

### Comprehension Questions

#### A

1. **Where was Mark Tyler living?**  
He was living in his nephew's home.
2. **Why was Mark grateful?**  
Because his nephew and niece-in-law gave him shelter and a place to live.
3. **How did Mark show his gratitude?**  
By taking care of the flower beds and helping prepare dinner when Lucy was late.
4. **What kind of work did Mark like to do outdoors?**  
He liked keeping the flower beds neat and tidy.
5. **Why was kneeling and getting up difficult for him?**  
Because he was old and weak.
6. **How did Lucy react when Mark helped her?**  
She called him "a darling" and thanked him warmly.
7. **How did Lucy's words make Mark feel?**  
They made him feel happy and emotionally warm all evening.

#### B

1. **How is Mark described physically?**  
He had silver-gray hair, blue eyes, and a sun-bronzed face.
2. **What does "his understanding was keen and intuitive" mean?**  
It means he was sharp and could easily understand things without being told.
3. **What was Lucy particular about in her home?**  
She wanted every chair, vase, and flower to be perfectly arranged.
4. **Did John and Lucy have children?**  
No, they didn't.
5. **Why did John and Lucy stay busy with activities?**  
To fill the emptiness of not having children.
6. **Why did Mark believe his nephew and Lucy had big hearts?**  
Because they took him into their home kindly.
7. **How did Mark behave toward them?**  
He tried to please them, stayed humble, and didn't want to bother them.
8. **How did Mark feel inside?**  
He felt lonely, even though he lived with family.

#### C

- 1. What did Mark notice across the street?**  
A white and brown setter dog that belonged to the Wilsons.
- 2. What kind of family were the Wilsons?**  
They were new neighbors with two small children.
- 3. How did the dog behave during the day?**  
It waited sadly and patiently for the children to come home.
- 4. How did the dog act when the children arrived?**  
It became excited and playful.
- 5. What did the dog do at night?**  
It lay outside the door, hoping for attention.
- 6. What did Mark notice about the dog's loneliness?**  
He saw that the dog was lonely, just like he was.
- 7. How did Mark first start connecting with the dog?**  
He stopped by the Wilson house and spoke softly to it during his walks.
- 8. Did the dog trust him immediately?**  
No, the dog was cautious and only watched him carefully at first.

## D

- 1. What was the dog's name?**  
The dog's name was Ricky.
- 2. Why did Mark talk to Mrs. Wilson?**  
To ask if he could give bones to Ricky.
- 3. What was Mrs. Wilson's reaction?**  
She said she didn't mind and admitted they didn't pay much attention to Ricky.
- 4. What did Mark do after talking to her?**  
He gave Ricky a bone and began feeding him sometimes.
- 5. How did Ricky's behavior change over time?**  
He started coming closer and eventually took food directly from Mark's hand.
- 6. How did their friendship develop?**  
Slowly and politely, with respect and distance between them.
- 7. What does "as gentlemen should" mean in this context?**  
It means they behaved with quiet respect and proper manners.

## E

- 1. What happened one morning during Mark's walk?**  
Ricky followed him.
- 2. How did Ricky behave when Mark spoke kindly to him?**  
He ran happily ahead, exploring bushes.
- 3. What new activity did they start doing together?**  
They took daily walks together.
- 4. How did Ricky act when Mark worked in the garden?**  
He came close but always waited politely.
- 5. What showed that Ricky might have been rejected before?**  
His careful, hesitant behavior.
- 6. What did Mark notice about Ricky's eyes?**  
They looked deep and searching, full of feeling.
- 7. What funny thing did Mark notice about Ricky's face?**  
That Ricky lifted his mouth in a way that looked like a smile.
- 8. What kind of bond did they have?**  
A deep friendship based on respect and affection.

9. **Why did Mark never call Ricky to come?**  
Because he respected Ricky's freedom to choose when to come.

## **F**

1. **How did their friendship change over time?**  
It grew into real love and devotion.
2. **How did Ricky show his love for Mark?**  
By wagging his tail wildly, tugging his pants, and rolling in joy.
3. **How did Ricky's presence affect Mark's life?**  
It made his days happy and meaningful again.
4. **Where did Ricky go at night sometimes?**  
To lie outside Mark's door.
5. **Why didn't Ricky come inside?**  
Because he knew he wasn't allowed in the house.
6. **What did Mark do when Ricky came?**  
He talked softly to him, making him content.
7. **How was Ricky's love for Mark different from his love for the Wilson children?**  
His love for Mark was loyal and deep—like a dog's love for his master.

## **G**

1. **What news surprised Mark?**  
That the Wilsons were moving to the country.
2. **How did this change affect Mark?**  
It left him feeling empty and lonely again.
3. **How did Mark try to deal with his sadness?**  
By working constantly and keeping himself busy.
4. **What did Lucy say to him?**  
She told him he was doing too much work.
5. **How did Mark reply?**  
He said he needed to "keep limber," meaning to stay active.
6. **Why didn't Mark talk about Ricky?**  
Because he was quietly trying to deal with the pain on his own.

## **H**

1. **What did Mark hear one night?**  
A soft scratching sound at his door.
2. **Who was it?**  
It was Ricky, who had returned to him.
3. **How did Mark feel when he realized who it was?**  
He was overjoyed but trembling with emotion.
4. **What condition was Ricky in?**  
He was tired and travel-worn but happy.
5. **Why didn't Mark welcome Ricky fully?**  
Because he knew it wouldn't be right to keep a dog that belonged to another family.
6. **What did Mark realize about divided loyalty?**  
That a dog can't belong to two people at once.
7. **Why did Mark hold back from petting Ricky?**  
He didn't want to make the dog a tramp with no home.

## **I**

1. **What did Mark imagine to comfort himself?**  
Ricky playing happily in the countryside with the Wilson children.
2. **How did Mark feel when Ricky came close?**  
Torn between happiness and pain.
3. **What did he do instead of keeping Ricky?**  
He called Mrs. Wilson to tell her Ricky was safe.
4. **Who came to take Ricky home?**  
Mr. Wilson.
5. **How did Ricky behave when Mr. Wilson arrived?**  
He lay outside the door, confused and unwilling to leave.
6. **What did Mr. Wilson say to Ricky?**  
He spoke roughly and wondered what to do with him.

## J

1. **Had Mark ever spoken to Mr. Wilson before?**  
Only to greet him briefly, never in conversation.
2. **What advice did Mark give Mr. Wilson?**  
To spend time with Ricky—talk to him, walk with him, and let him stay near.
3. **Why did Mark give this advice?**  
Because he understood how much love and companionship Ricky needed.
4. **How did Mr. Wilson react?**  
At first he was annoyed, but then he realized Mark was right.
5. **What did Mark tell Ricky at the end?**  
He told him gently to go home.
6. **How did Mark feel when Ricky left?**  
Deeply sad and empty, knowing their friendship was over.

## Summary

“*Stolen Friendship*” tells the touching story of **Mark Tyler**, an old and lonely man living with his nephew and niece-in-law. While grateful for their care, he feels isolated until he befriends **Ricky**, a neglected dog from across the street. Their quiet companionship brings warmth and purpose to Mark’s life. When Ricky’s family moves away, Mark is heartbroken—but when the loyal dog travels back to find him, Mark must make the painful, selfless choice to send him home. The story shows the deep bond between man and dog, and the sadness of love that must let go for the other’s good.

## Paragraph by Paragraph Summary

### A

Mark Tyler, an old man, was thankful to live with his nephew and his wife, Lucy. To show his gratitude, he took care of the garden even though it was hard for him. When Lucy came home late, he sometimes helped by preparing dinner. Her kind words made him very happy.

### B

Mark was old, with gray hair and blue eyes, but he was still smart and observant. He respected Lucy’s desire for a neat home. John and Lucy had no children and kept themselves busy to fill that emptiness. Mark appreciated their kindness in taking him in. He tried to please them, didn’t want to disturb them, and felt lonely despite living with them.

### C

Mark noticed a dog across the street — a white setter named Ricky that belonged to the Wilson family. The dog looked lonely during the day but became happy when the Wilson children came home. Mark, who also felt lonely, began talking softly to the dog whenever he passed by. The dog was cautious but curious about him.

## **D**

Mark learned the dog's name was Ricky. Since he never saw Ricky chewing bones, he asked Mrs. Wilson if he could give him some. She agreed. Mark began feeding Ricky, who slowly started to trust him. Eventually, Ricky let Mark touch his head. The two became quiet friends, respecting each other's space.

## **E**

One morning, Ricky followed Mark on his walk. After Mark spoke kindly, the dog ran happily ahead. From then on, they walked together every day. Ricky also came to the yard when Mark worked. The dog was shy but very happy with Mark's attention. Over time, they developed a strong friendship based on respect and affection.

## **F**

Their friendship grew into deep love. Ricky was always excited to see Mark and made him feel young and alive again. The dog sometimes came at night to lie outside Mark's door, happy just to be near him. Ricky's love for Mark was special—different from the love he had for the Wilson children. Mark became happier because of Ricky's companionship.

## **G**

Mark never thought Ricky would be taken away. But one day, he learned that the Wilsons were moving to the countryside. When they left, Mark felt empty and heartbroken. He worked constantly to distract himself and didn't talk about how much he missed Ricky. After some days, he started walking alone again.

## **H**

Two weeks later, one night when the house was quiet, Mark heard a soft scratching at his door—it was Ricky! The dog had traveled back to find him. Mark was overjoyed but also heartbroken. He knew that if he welcomed Ricky, the dog would become a stray. Ricky belonged to the Wilsons and had to stay with his family, even though Mark loved him deeply.

## **I**

Mark imagined Ricky playing happily in the countryside with the Wilson children. Although he longed to keep the dog, he forced himself to do the right thing. He called Mrs. Wilson to tell her Ricky was safe. When Mr. Wilson came to get the dog, Ricky stayed by Mark's door, confused and unwilling to leave.

## **J**

Mark spoke gently to Mr. Wilson, advising him to give Ricky more attention—to talk to him, walk with him, and let him stay near the fire. He explained that a dog needs love and companionship. Mr. Wilson understood and promised to change. When Ricky hesitated, Mark, though filled with sadness, told him to go home. Ricky obeyed, and Mark knew their friendship had ended forever.