

Blondi and Friend

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Herman Petze stretched out upon his analyst's couch. It had lately begun to conform to the shape of his body. Herman would have to fight off the drowsiness induced by the comfortable couch, the dimmed lamp, and Dr. Reithl's mellow, reassuring voice. Herman found his favorite buttons in the tufted leather and wriggled his fingers in the depressions. He was about to sink away into the somnolent, twilight state of remembrance, but the careful urgency in Dr. Reithl's voice delayed his departure.

"I am afraid, Mr. Petze, that we have grown much too cozy here. I am worried that your progress seems to have halted far short of our goal. Please, Mr. Petze, sit up. Yes, and place your feet on the floor, if you would."

His groan was inaudible, but the grimace on Herman's face could not be concealed. Herman felt uprooted, exposed to the stale air. He began to shiver.

"I would like for us to attempt something a little different during this session, Mr. Petze. We have tried hypnosis upon two other occasions, and with very little bearing upon the progress of your therapy, I might add. But, as has been suggested by a colleague of mine, perhaps we did not regress you far enough. Do you understand what I am propounding, Mr. Petze?"

Herman nodded his head weakly, but abandoned that insincere gesture for a simple shrug of his shoulders.

"What I would like for us to do is commonly called a 'regression into past lives'. Do not look so startled, Mr. Petze. This is merely a new technique we will be trying. We shall proceed cautiously

at first. We must do something to shake ourselves out of the lethargic pace of your therapy. Now, please look at my fingers.”

Dr. Reithl held his open palm but a few inches from his patient’s face. The angle of light from the single lamp illumined only the padded tips of the fingers and thumb, the rest of the doctor’s hand remaining in shadow.

“We shall begin to count backwards now. Five,” the doctor said, folding his thumb into the darkness of his palm.

Herman was content to remain where he was. He did not wish to go on any journeys of exploration. But, as in the old advertisements for Victrolas, in which the dog inclined his head towards the horn of the gramophone, Herman could do nothing other than heed his master’s voice. He began falling into the voice, down the sides of the polished brass horn, inevitably.

“Four.” The doctor’s index finger folded out of sight. “Three... two... one.” The remaining fingers disappeared, along with Herman’s desire to resist.

“Now, Mr. Petze, I want you to go back to the incident in your crib. No, do not worry. The sides of the crib are fastened quite securely this time. You cannot fall out. Please relax. Breathe slowly. You are in no danger.”

Herman gripped the top rail of the wooden gate across his cradle. The blood pulsed in his fingers until it seemed to him that the wooden rail was itself alive, throbbing with the rhythm of its own heart.

“You are lying safely in your cradle, Mr. Petze. Close your eyes and let your head sink into the soft pillow. Go back now, to your earliest recollection. Go back before then, Mr. Petze. One year, two years... three years. Tell me what you see, Mr. Petze.”

Herman began growling, then barking loudly and persistently. The doctor's voice could barely be heard above the commotion.

"Stop that, Mr. Petze! You can speak! Wherever you are, you can speak now. Tell me what you see."

Herman repeated his low growling, stuttering in his attempt to form words. "Him," he uttered, in quite the same guttural tone. "I see him."

"Calmly now, Mr. Petze. You are witnessing this scene only as a spectator. The past cannot harm you again. Tell me, what is your name?"

"Blondi," Herman said.

"You are a woman?" Dr. Reithl asked, rubbing his hands together.

"Yes," Herman said, but quickly changed his mind. "No."

"Which is it to be, Mr... um... Blondi?" the doctor asked. His hand skipped so furiously across his notepad that the words became nearly illegible.

"I am a dog," Herman announced. "A female dog."

"Incredible," Dr. Reithl muttered, leaning so far forward in his seat as to be nearly in his patient's face.

"What do you see, Blondi?"

"The desk. There is a letter stuck under the drawer of the desk. Boots. I see his boots now. Tall black boots."

"Whose boots do you see, Blondi?"

Herman hesitated, emitting a low, guttural growl.

"Please, go on. Tell me whose boots you see."

“That man’s. I don’t like those boots. I want to bite his boots.”

“Does the man have a name?”

“Yes. They call him ‘Bormann’. He is like my master’s shadow. I don’t like Bormann. When I was a whelp, he kicked me. He is the one who gave me to my master.”

“Is your master good to you, Blondi?”

“Yes, mostly. His strokes are gentle. He talks to me. And, when he eats alone in this room, that is most of the time now, he gives me little scraps from his plate. Sauerbraten. I like sauerbraten. And knackwurst.”

“That is very nice, Blondi. But you must come forward now to the sound of my voice. You must come back to Mr. Petze. One, two. Three, slowly. Four, that’s it. Five.”

Herman sat suddenly bolt upright from his rather slouched position. His eyes flared as Dr. Reithl’s office came into focus.

“We seem to have got somewhere, Mr. Petze. Do you recall anything of today’s session?”

“I think I fell out of that cradle again.”

“What makes you say that, hmm?”

“Well, I was on the floor, Doctor. It seemed that I was looking up at everything.”

“That’s very interesting. We’ll discuss this more next time, Mr. Petze. Perhaps we shall want to have you recall a bit of what you see. What do say to that, Mr. Petze?”

Herman shrugged. He did not wish to appear eager about anything his analyst suggested. That usually only encouraged him.

“We’ll see you on Friday then.”

Herman lifted himself from the leather couch. He was reminded how heavily his body weighed on him after these sessions, but today it had been especially troublesome. He was glad for the three days' vacation he would have from Dr. Reithl. He felt lighter already and all but glided out of the office.

Dr. Reithl consulted with his colleague only very briefly over the interesting case of Herman Petze. He certainly did not wish to divulge too much, for he sniffed a publishable paper in the air. To his knowledge, this case was the first instance of a past life regression in which the subject was other than just another human being. Perhaps, he thought, Mr. Petze was simply batty in that life, too, imagining himself a dog. But the name "Bormann" rang vaguely familiar to him. Perhaps it was a name Mr. Petze had mentioned in earlier sessions. The doctor would have to go over his notes before their next meeting.

At the very least it was refreshing to Dr. Reithl to hear of a regression in which the subject had not been Cleopatra or Louis XIV or some other famous personage. This case would seem more credible precisely because of its ordinariness.

Dr. Reithl enjoyed the control he exercised over his patients. That was exactly what made him a good therapist in his opinion, for he had the necessary power and authority to take charge over the lives of those simply too weak and muddled to handle their own affairs and destinies. Mr. Petze was an exceptionally good case, he felt, and he looked forward to their next session with barely containable enthusiasm. That would be the time to put the thumb-screws to him and force him to recall something really unpleasant. It was, after all, for his own good.

"Do come in, Mr. Petze. I didn't hear you enter the vestibule. We have wasted a very valuable ten minutes already, I'm afraid."

Herman plopped down on the couch, already lifting his legs up off the carpeted floor to ease himself into his favorite position.

“Please remain sitting this time. We want to get right down to business, don’t we?”

Herman offered his usual gesture of noncommittal.

“We are going to regress quite far again this time, Mr. Petze. I ask, as a mere formality, to have the recorder on during this session. My colleague is very interested in anything bearing upon metempsychoses — that is the technical term for this transmigration of the life force into some other body. Now, please relax.”

Herman slumped a little further. Dr. Reithl raised his hand out towards his patient, but his own chair was so far from the couch that the gesture looked more like a salute. It startled Herman.

“Please, Mr. Petze. I want you to relax. I order you to relax. Now, look at my fingers.”

Herman gazed at the doctor’s upraised palm and immediately lost all resistance to the doctor’s voice. He slipped into the hypnotic state before Dr. Reithl had reached the count of three. He was regressed quickly past the crib incident. He did not bark this time, but he had nevertheless soon assumed the persona of the dog Blondi.

Dr. Reithl cleverly got Blondi to look at herself in a long mirror that reached down to the floor of that faraway room. She described herself as a large tawny Alsatian.

“Tell me more about your master, Blondi.”

“My master is not so tall as some of the other people who come here. He is good to me. He gives me all the meat from his plate. He does not like meat. But some people say he is bad. I do not know. He does not like Eva’s little terriers and he kicks them when she is not looking. Sometimes,

now, he kicks me too. I want to bite him sometimes, but I am afraid. I am afraid of the tall black boots.”

Suddenly, a connection was made across several of Dr. Reithl’s synapses. Bormann? Eva? Could it be?

“Who is Eva, Blondi?”

“A woman. She is the master’s mate, I think.”

“Who is your master, Blondi?”

“You. You are my master, Mein Führer.”

“No! You are crazy! Du verrückte Hundin! Get down! Come back, Mr. Petze. Now! Eins, zwei... Blondi, komm herunter! Jetzt, du schäbiger Köter! Drei...”

Herman pounced on his analyst and wrestled him to the floor. Dr. Reithl could not get the advantage. His nose was bloodied, and a little smear of a mustache formed on his upper lip.

“Get off, you crazy dog. Mr. Petze! Four! Wake up!”

Herman got round to the other side of him and took hold of Dr. Reithl’s ankle in his teeth, snarling. Without further warning, he bit into the doctor’s flesh hard enough to draw blood.

“Nein! Nein! Get off, you mangy cur. Nein! Es ist nicht wahr! Fünf, Blondi. Fünf!”

Herman came suddenly to himself, wondering what had happened during the session that could have brought them to the floor. He saw the doctor’s bloody nose, the trickle now reaching to his chin, and thought it actually quite funny. That’ll teach you to play tricks with people’s minds, he thought.

Dr. Reithl lay on the floor, holding his ankle and babbling on in what sounded to his patient like German, angry German at that. But Herman felt quite relieved. Whatever the session had

produced, Herman was all for it. He felt positively light, as though he could float out of the room. A little embarrassed at what he might have said or done to the doctor, he stole out of the office the moment Dr. Reithl, sobbing, buried his face in his hands.

Dr. Reithl continued his unintelligible frothing and blowing until his colleague, Dr. Brown, found him that evening. That same colleague was later required to sign the commitment papers for the unfortunate doctor. Dr. Brown could not imagine a worse torture for an analyst of sound body than to find himself in an unsound mind, contemplating the fine difference between psychoneurosis and neuropsychosis for all his remaining days.