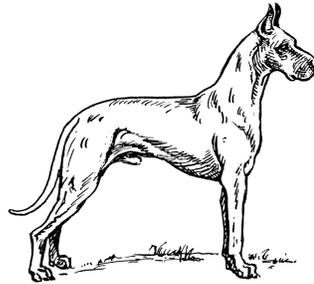


Barkley's Sandbar Christmas Miracle



Christopher Metcalf

Book Excerpt -- Chapter 3

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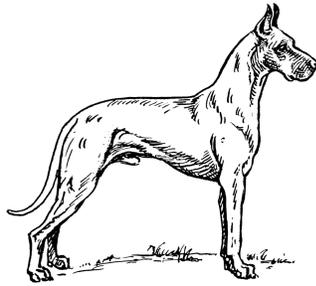
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'Twas the night before Christmas, when all thru' the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.

—*Clement C. Moore, 1823*



CHAPTER THREE

It was Christmastime 1964. Barkley and I were both single guys. I worked late too often, so when I got home, the big fella was ready for our walk. He would let me fix a TV dinner or make a sandwich, but was ready to go as soon as I finished, usually standing by the door with his leash hanging from his mouth.

That Christmas Eve, I had an office party that lasted until almost 10 o'clock. When I got home, Barkley was at the door waiting impatiently. He'd been alone all day and was ready to run and play. He didn't much care about the present I had bought and wrapped for him and put under the tree. He just wanted to run. I couldn't blame him.

So I changed into my walking shoes and a jacket. The temperature was in the 40s outside that evening, so not too cold at all. Barkley tugged at the leash as we walked out the front door and down the steps. I lived about three

blocks from the Arkansas River, so it only took a few minutes to make it to the park along the river's edge.

I could see into many of the houses we passed. Christmas trees were lit up everywhere. Houses were decorated with lights and garland and bows. Most of the children were already in bed dreaming about what they'd find under their tree the next morning.

The weathermen had confirmed the bad news for the kids a couple of days earlier – it would not be a white Christmas this year. That was always a bummer, but just how it goes in Oklahoma. Sometimes we go an entire winter without snow. Other years we get several massive snowstorms with more than a foot of the white stuff. You never can tell.

Barkley and I had been walking for more than an hour and I was pooped, but he wanted to keep going. And since he had been cooped up all day, I felt like he deserved an extra long walk that night. We made it to the edge of the river just before midnight. I didn't much feel like hiking out onto his sandbar, but one look in his eyes told me he wouldn't be denied. So we trekked down the steep riverbank to the edge of the water and then I scrambled across a large log in the water to keep my feet dry on a cold night. Barkley just bounced and splashed through the water. He didn't care if it was chilly. Once we made it over to the sandbar, I unsnapped Barkley's leash from his collar and watched him rocket across his personal little desert.

The usual process at this point would be for me to chase after him, maybe grab a stick and throw it for him to retrieve and then we would wrestle. He always won and I always ended up with sand down my neck and in my shoes and a soaking wet face from all his licking.

But this night was anything but usual. First of all, it was Christmas Eve. And second, what happened next was anything but normal or even believable.

I was out in the middle of the sandbar and Barkley was running around me like he was on a racetrack. Then he suddenly stopped. He basically skidded to a halt and cocked his head as he looked at me and then turned his massive head to look up at the night sky. About that time, I heard something as well and looked to the black night above. I couldn't see anything but stars.

I could just barely hear the faintest noise. It sounded like a chain rattling in the distance. And I thought I could hear bells ringing. And then a moment later, I swore I could hear someone yelling, shouting.

A few seconds later, I saw something up there. Barkley saw it too and barked a few times. His loud, deep bark just carried across the sandbar and the water. No way of telling what it was from that distance with only the dim light of the moon above. But it was definitely something. And it was coming our way.

"What the heck?" I said and Barkley whimpered in agreement.

I took a couple of steps toward Barkley and he started to back up toward me. He barked again. It was more like a howl this time. The rattling chains noise got louder and the shouting became clearer. I could hear a voice yelling out commands. It was a deep and booming voice. And for some reason, it was a familiar voice.

Several seconds later I could see that whatever it was up there, it was coming down right at me and Barkley. I stepped over to him and patted his shoulder to keep him calm. But I was also ready to push him one way or the other if this thing continued its path directly at us.

And then it came into view. The dim moon provided just enough light to see it a littler clearer. It was just a couple hundred feet away from us and coming in too fast. It was going to crash. The booming voice called out, "Whoa boys! Whoa now!" I didn't believe my eyes at first, who would? It was impossible.