

A Note on the Ottoman

By: SHAWN ROBINSON

A message to every member of the Frederick family:

It has come to my attention by way of Miss Helen, an individual who many of you children will be more comfortable and familiar with me referring to as “the cleaning lady,” more specifically as “the fat one,” that our family dog, Buster, often whimpers and displays, and I quote, “an unusual sadness in his eyes.” My initial thoughts, as yours surely are, are that Buster must be sick. I promptly replied to Miss Helen by inquiring if our pup has shown any physical manifestations of illness, whether they be vomiting, irregular eating, or other sorts of accidents within the house. As I awaited her answer, I began, as any great mind would, to determine the point at which euthanasia would transform from an act of cruelty to one of mercy, and the most certain path to Buster’s ultimate happiness at that. I figured the point to be four thousand dollars, give or take two hundred depending on the probability of success of any required procedure, but Miss Helen claims Buster’s dilemma is not rooted in a lack of health or physical ailment, but rather an emotional one. Miss Helen states Buster is feeling lonely and unloved and she proposes that only remedying these feelings will rid us of the pestilent whimpering and uneasy “sad eyes.”

It should be noted and forever remembered by all current and future descendants of the Frederick line that it was not I, but my wife and your mother, Mrs. Abraham Frederick, strongly supported by the eldest Frederick children, Mary and Hue, who believed the acquisition of a dog to be a worthwhile endeavor. Aside from the obvious economic fallacy in the constant replenishing of supplies of food, water, and colored rubber in the shape of small creatures meant to trick the animal into believing they are true hunters like their much more honorable ancestors, I also knew a certain amount of personal finesse would be

needed to keep the beast tame, a finesse only developed through time and effort. This and a few other truths came to be known to me in my youth at university, and I acknowledge that you all have not yet been graced with such an opportunity—some probably never will be (William, Francis, Jane, and the honorable Mrs. Abraham Frederick surely will not). While I do not hold this lack of circumstance against any of you, as any civil gentleman should not, I must say that I too feel the measured mind of our lineage’s most educated member should be given more credence from this day hence. That does not, however, affect or solve the current Buster debacle. Because he is merely seven, an age by which current metrics find to be around the equivalence of a forty-nine-year-old man in relation to wit and liveliness, we can expect Buster to be present in the house for the next several years. And, since nobody likes a damn downer moping about, canine or otherwise, I have taken it upon myself to ensure that Buster’s pessimism and loneliness soon subsides.

Miss Helen is convinced that simply paying more attention to Buster will improve his emotional condition and make him much less of a buzzkill. With this in mind, I have developed a plan and scheduled each family member shifts during which paying attention to Buster is of the utmost importance. Because even the wisest men heed the advice of others, I entrusted the schematics of my proposed strategy to Gary at work today. He said, and I quote, “Yeah, whatever.” I suspect Gary’s lack of enthusiasm spawns from a poisonous mixture of inherent difficulty in comprehending the enlightened philosophies that brought forth such a solution and jealousy that I won the work raffle last week, granting me the tickets to the upcoming Beach Boys reunion concert and not him. Neither can be helped. This world is one of inequalities, and I learned long ago that kindness and professional

success cannot coexist. The following procedures unfortunately exclude Mary and Hue, since both are spending the season at Aunt Susan's, a bothersome fact considering they have been so deeply intertwined in this foolish pursuit from the start.

Each day shall begin at seven o'clock, when Buster commonly awakes to use the restroom. It will be the responsibility of Alphonse to let him out to do this and to also gather firewood for the day in the interim period between when Buster is let out and let in.

From seven forty-five until the time they must leave for school, the twins Jane and Jenn will take care of him. Because you will be eating breakfast during your shift, try offering table scraps to Buster. I have often read cats and dogs are fond of this practice, the latter even more so. From nine o'clock until eleven, I entrust Buster to Mrs. Abraham Frederick. This is normally the time you would use for your sewing and knitting. I propose you tell Buster that the current piece you are working on is for him. That should lift his spirits some and make him feel more a part of the family. I would not, however, carry through and actually make him anything. I once read that dogs are poor judges of sincerity, so you should be able to save the resources without offending him.

At eleven, as Mrs. Abraham Frederick begins to prepare dinner, William's shift will begin. While there may be some protestation on the grounds that William is but an infant, I believe he is more than capable of handling the task, especially since the number of burdens that he must attend to daily are so fewer than every other family member. For this reason, he will be given the longest shift—from eleven until three o'clock. I depend on some other Frederick in the company of William to instruct him on this new responsibility, seeing as how he will be unable to read this message. If upon hearing the news he begins to cry as he is so infamously known for doing at the least appropriate times, I do hope young William finds solace in the fact that many texts and studies have

shown that infants and young children are consistently considered to be more pleasant and likable than adults, putting him at a natural advantage.

When school is over at three, Francis, Catherine, Oliver, Charles, Gregor, and Edward will rotate shifts in the following order, and do pay attention because I will not write it again: Francis shall have a shift while Catherine and Gregor practice violin. Then Gregor will be with Buster through Francis and Edward's afternoon jog, at which point Edward will take over until Catherine and Oliver have completed their daily sonnets. Catherine should then go change for dinner as Oliver takes a turn during Francis and Gregor's vocal lessons, Charles having authority once those are over until Catherine is fully dressed, who shall then have her shift up until dinner as everyone else follows suit and dresses.

After dinner I will spend the evening with Buster in my study until he or I becomes tired and goes to bed.

Each shift with Buster shall include at the minimum:

Five (5) head rubs.

Four (4) back rubs.

Four (4) ear scratches.

Three (3) tosses of the colored rubber (or any other bouncy and unneeded projectile).

Two (2) stomach rubs.

And one (1) mention and questioning of whether or not he needs to be let outside to use the restroom.

The last piece of advice I can give you all is to attempt to incorporate Buster into your conversations more often. Frequently he sits in a room of lively discussion without the slightest regard given to his presence. Keep in mind that his lack of response to your inquiries, much like with William, does not spawn from spite or rudeness, but rather a fundamental inability to speak. If talking directly to a mute creature offends your sensibilities, attempt instead to bring up topics Buster may enjoy listening about in your dialogue with others. Topics that may be

agreeable to him include walks and walking, squirrels and about in your dialogue with others. Topics that may be agreeable to him include walks and walking, squirrels and birds, bones and digging, as well as debate and discussion on who is or who is not a good boy.

I am confident that these procedures will improve the health of our companion and will make our estate a much more enjoyable place.

Sincerely,
Mr. Abraham Frederick

Shawn Robinson is a freshman in English.