

Pebbels

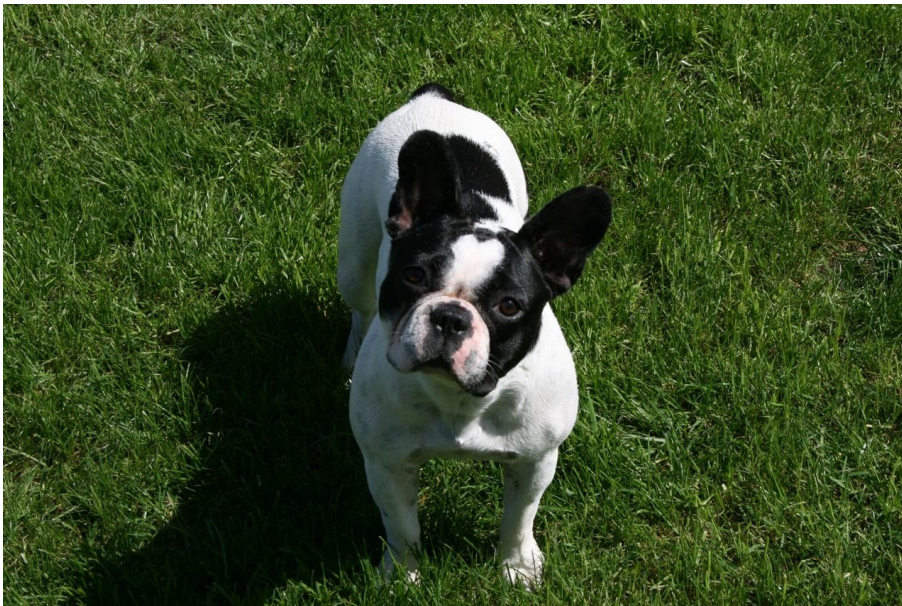
PEBBELS

The story of a little personality who wasn't a dog

by Patric Haase

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For my little princess — you were never just a dog.



Foreword

This is not a book about a dog.

I know that's not how you start a book if you want people to read it. But it's the truth, and I've promised myself not to sugarcoat anything in this book — not her life, not her death, and least of all what she was.

I never thought I'd write a book one day. I'm not a writer. I'm someone who works with technology, with numbers, with machines. But there are things in life that turn you into something you weren't before. She was one of those things. And this book is the attempt to pass that on — to people who never knew her.

Her name was Pebbels. She was a French Bulldog, small, and for most of her life she lived in the firm belief that she was the queen. I never took that belief away from her, because it was true.

If this book achieves anything, then this: that someone, somewhere, closes it and looks at their own dog — or their cat, or whatever is lying next to them — and understands for the first time that what's lying there isn't an "animal" but a living being. A personality. A someone. If that happens, then she made a difference even after her death. And I never wished for anything more.

This is her story. From beginning to end. And everything she taught me along the way — about dogs, about respect, about love, and in the end about the hardest thing there is: letting go.

Let's start where she started. In a garage.

PART ONE — How It All Began

Where her story began.

Chapter 1 • The Garage

You lock a dog in the garage when it's too wild. When it tears the place apart, when it won't get house-trained, when it bites. That's what people think. That's what I thought too, before I knew her.

With her, it was different. She wasn't locked away because she was too weak or too difficult in the usual sense. She was locked away because she was too much. Too much herself.

It started with two rejections, one right after the other. First her own mother: she savaged her, cast her out, pushed her out of the litter. And then the human who should have been there to catch her — the breeder. Instead of taking care of the cast-out little pup, she locked her in a kennel in the garage.

You have to picture that for a moment. A puppy her own mother didn't want anymore needs someone to catch her more than ever — closeness, warmth, protection. She got the opposite. She got a kennel and four cold walls. Cast out by her mother and locked away by a human. Dropped twice, before her life had even properly begun.

And the reason was not that something was wrong with her. I'm convinced the reason was that she had a personality, even as a little thing — and that a personality like that doesn't make itself small, doesn't submit, doesn't fall in line. She was too much. Too much of an individual. Too much herself. And the world's answer to her strength was a garage.

I've often thought about it since, and I believe there's a bitter truth in it that goes far beyond dogs: it's often the strongest, the most headstrong, who get weeded out. Not the weak. The ones who won't bend. The world — with people just like with animals — has little patience for those who are too much themselves. People want conformity. People want quiet. And whoever doesn't play along ends up, one way or another, in a garage.

But here's the astonishing thing: she didn't break. Sitting in that garage was no crushed little dog waiting for rescue and losing her soul over it. Sitting there, as I understood later, was

already the whole Pebbles — with everything that made her who she was. The stubbornness. The brains. The will. The charm and the wit that everyone who met her would later see. It was all already there, from the very start. Neither the mother who cast her out nor the kennel they locked her in could take that from her. She kept her personality the way other dogs keep a bone — she never gave it up again, not at any price.

And then I came along.

I didn't know back then what I was getting into. I didn't know I was about to meet the being that would one day be closer to me than any other I've ever met. All I saw was a little dog that belonged somewhere that wasn't the garage.

We got her out of there. That's the simplest sentence in this whole book and maybe the most important. We got her out of there, and from that moment on she was no longer the one who gets locked away. She was the one who gets protected.

I came to her the way probably everyone does who gets a dog: dead set on showing her who's boss. It took me years to understand just how wrong I was about that. But that's a story for later.

For now, it's enough to know what was already settled in that garage, on the day when nobody loved her yet: she was somebody. She was not one to let herself be made small. And for the rest of her life she would try to be entirely and completely herself — right to the bitter end.

She did it.

Chapter 2 • The Deal



I didn't want a dog at all.

You have to know that to understand how unlikely all of this was. I wasn't looking, wasn't wishing, wasn't planning. If it had been up to me, Pebbels would never have existed in my life. And today she's the being my heart has opened up to more than any other. That's how it goes sometimes: the most important thing doesn't come because you're looking for it. It comes even though you say no.

We already had Bam Bam. He was from the first litter at the same breeder's — the older one, the calm one. And in her second litter, a few years later, was the little one.

It was summer. I was kneeling in the meadow, and she came running up — this little thing — and curled up right in front of me. Just like that. In front of me, of all people, the one who didn't want a dog at all. I didn't read much into it back then. Today I know what it was: she picked me. Not me her. She me. In that moment, in the meadow, that little one made her decision — long before I made mine.

Then she trotted back to the others as if nothing had happened, cool, her business done. And it wasn't until the evening that Nicole and her friend drove off to get her.

Because — and this is the part I'm almost ashamed of — I actually didn't want her. The two of them talked at me for so long, kept working on me for so long, that I finally gave in. I didn't say yes out of longing for a dog. At some point I said yes because they wouldn't let up. And so, half talked into it, half reluctant, suddenly there she was: my little Pebbels.

When I tell it today, it seems almost eerie to me how close it was. A little less persistence from the two of them, a little more stubbornness from me — and I would have missed the best thing, without ever knowing it existed. But she had already decided, back in the meadow. Maybe I just needed to be talked into signing my half of a deal she had long since sealed.

The next day, the first surprise: she was full of lice. Of course she was — with everything she'd already been through; who would have bothered with something like that. So everything got powdered, thoroughly, until nothing was crawling anymore. And poor Bam Bam had to suffer along with her, as he so often would in the years to come — treated right along with her, even though he didn't have a thing. That was the beginning of a long tradition: wherever Pebbels was, Bam Bam was part of it, whether he wanted to be or not.

And at some point in those first weeks, what I call our deal came into being. No contract, nothing spoken — more like a quiet understanding between her and me. She was allowed to unfold completely. To be entirely herself, with everything that came with it: the stubbornness, the charm, the cheek. Except for a very few limits that made sense, I let her have everything.

And now maybe you understand why that meant more to her than it would to other dogs. Where she came from, exactly that had been her undoing: being herself had landed her in the kennel. With me, that same nature became the core of the whole arrangement. Where she had been punished for it before, with me she got the freedom to live it out. And I believe that's the reason she blossomed the way she did — because for the first time she was in a place where what she was wasn't just tolerated, but wanted.

The dog I didn't want became the love of my life. And she had known it the whole time. She had known it in the meadow, on the day she curled up in front of me and made me her human — no matter what I had to say about it back then.

And one thing belongs to the truth of this beginning: Pebbels wasn't the only one who already knew back then. Nicole knew it too — otherwise she wouldn't have driven off that evening. She brought her into my house, against my no and for my happiness. I will never forget her for that. Even though we both know: the real decision had long since been made by someone else — the smallest of us all. # PART TWO — Who She Was

Only her. Every side of who she was, in real scenes.

Chapter 3 • The Guardian



She was a guardian. That sounds big for a little bulldog, but it's true. She observed, kept watch, kept everything under control — in the garden, on the terrace, in the house. Nothing escaped her.

As long as we were home, she was relaxed. She only sounded the alarm when someone actually came to the front door — the rest she left to me. When I was there, I had the watch; she didn't need to bother. That was the division of duties, completely natural.

But as soon as we were gone, she took over the post. And how she did it, I only learned much later — from our neighbor. I never saw it myself. She did it entirely for herself, in secret.

She would go into the living room, climb up onto the back of the couch — the highest point, the best lookout in the whole room — and look out the window. From there she had everything in view. And God help anyone standing at the door down below: she could bark for hours. For hours. She guarded the house as if the fate of the world depended on it.

And then — this is the part that touches my heart to this day — as soon as one of our cars turned into the driveway, it was radio silence. Instantly. No more barking. The shift was over, because we were back. And then she ran down to the door and waited. From guardian to waiting dog, in seconds, just because we were back.

Think about what that means. All her keeping watch, all those hours of barking — that wasn't nerves, wasn't boredom. That was for us. She watched over our home until we came back. And the moment she realized we were back, all the tension fell away from her, and the only thing that still mattered was: standing at the door and waiting for us. First the job. Then us.

The most beautiful part: I didn't even know. She did it for years, without applause, without ever being able to show me "look, I kept watch." It wasn't a show. It was real, quiet loyalty — the kind you do because you do it, not because anyone's watching. It was the neighbor who finally told me. And I was moved when I found out.

And in a very practical way, it did something to me: I never worried when I was away. Never. Because I knew: someone is keeping watch. That was one of her quiet gifts — giving me peace of mind. She wouldn't have stopped a burglar, let's be honest. But that wasn't the point. It was about the feeling that the house wasn't empty, that a little guardian was holding the fort.

Think back to where she came from. We had gotten her out of a bad situation and protected her. And here she was doing the same thing, just in reverse: she protected us. She was my little protector, in her own way. It was no one-way street. I watched over her — her health, her well-being — and she watched over us, the territory, me. Two who looked out for each other. The big protector and the little one. That was our deal, without us ever having said it out loud.

She waited for us at the door. Every time. And if I'm honest, I believe a part of her is waiting there still.

Chapter 4 • Two Pieces

She tried to be herself right to the bitter end. She never gave up. Never. And if I had to choose one single scene that shows it, it would be the game with the stuffed toy.

We played tug-of-war a lot, she and I, each of us on one end of some stuffed toy. And this little bulldog had power you wouldn't believe. You see this little thing and think: well, I can do this with one hand behind my back. Yeah, right. She pulled, growled, threw her whole weight into it — and sooner, I'm not joking, sooner would the stuffed toy end up lying there in two pieces than she would let go. Before she lost, the thing broke. It was that simple.

And I always let her keep her trophy.

I could have won. I was stronger, of course I was. But I never set out to win. Because for her it wasn't about winning in the sporting sense — it was about being her. The fighter who captures her prey and defends it. And I left her that dignity, every time. It's a small thing, I know. But it

was my way of giving her what she needed: the pride, the victory, the feeling of being entirely herself.

When I think back on that game today, I see in it the will that ran through her whole life. That “before I lose, I’d rather rip the thing in two” — that wasn’t just the stuffed toy. That was her. It was the same will that carried her through one crisis after another. That let her cheat death more than once, when everyone already thought it was over. The little fighter with the stuffed toy and the big fighter who never gave in — it was one and the same unbending will.

Maybe it was exactly this will that kept her from breaking back then, when her own mother cast her out and they locked her away. She held on to herself the way she held on to the stuffed toy — and never gave up either one, not at any price. Giving up just wasn’t in her.

When I think of her today, I don’t think of weakness. I think of the little mouse with the shredded stuffed toy, proud of her trophy, full of power and defiance and life. That was her. And nothing and no one could break her.

She tried to be herself right to the bitter end. And she did it. The stuffed toy is the proof.

Chapter 5 • Good Girl



You know how it goes. The dog wants to be petted, puts its paw on you, “dude, come on.” A simple need, a simple signal. That’s how most dogs do it.

Not her.

With her, petting wasn’t a need you express. It was a negotiation you conduct — with a graduated system I admire to this day.

Level one: the paw, ever so gentle, plus the bedroom eyes. Charm offensive. “Would you maybe pet me?” Soft, seductive, with a flutter of the lashes. That usually did the trick.

If that didn't work, level two came. And three. And four. The paw got harder bit by bit, a little more demanding, a little clearer. From "please" to "I mean it" to "right now." She dialed it up slowly, in careful doses, level by level.

And now comes the point that impressed me most: she knew exactly where the line was. She never overdid it. Never pestered so long that it became a nuisance. She pushed the demand exactly to the point where it was still charming and not yet pushy — and there she held. That's no coincidence. She had sized up my patience precisely, calculated my tolerance threshold, and stopped right on the mark, just short of it. Only a being that truly understands the one it's dealing with can do something like that.

And if even that didn't help? Then she went looking for another victim. Visitors, for example. Why stay with one stubborn customer when there's a fresh, unsuspecting one sitting in the room who doesn't yet know what he's getting into? She simply switched markets.

And you won't believe what came next. When the visitor finally petted her, she threw me a look. That one look. "Tsk. If you don't want to, someone else will." Superior, almost snippy. Not a trace of neediness. That was attitude. She was making it plain to me that she had alternatives and that I was by no means irreplaceable. A little queen reminding her servants that she can always pick someone else.

And oh, the little actress. Sometimes Nicole would look at her and ask, just for fun: "What did you do this time?" And bam — onto her back, all fours in the air, the most doe-eyed picture of innocence in the world. "Me? Nothing! Look how good I am!"

And do you know what that sight actually meant? A frightened dog doesn't do that. A dog that's afraid ducks, makes itself small, backs away. She cheekily flung herself onto her back and played the charm card. A dog can only do that when it feels completely safe. That cheekiness, that confidence — that wasn't in spite of her past. It was the proof that she had overcome it.

Of course, it had its downsides too. You couldn't just take her along everywhere — to a restaurant, for example. There, her behavior was, for other people, a bit too ... in full bloom. But honestly, I didn't care. I could have broken her, trained her into a quiet, conforming dog that lies obediently under the table. I didn't. Better a real personality you can't take everywhere than a conforming, crushed animal. That was the deal. And I never regretted it.

Because that was exactly what I had promised her in the meadow without knowing it: she was allowed to be entirely herself. And this — the diva, the negotiator with the snippy look — this was the result. Remember where she came from: locked away because she was too much herself. And look what became of her when she was given the freedom: not a cowering, grateful little heap, but a confident little being who swapped out her servants as she pleased.

From being locked away to reigning. That was her path. And every paw on my arm — first gentle, then demanding — was a little proof of how far she had come.

Chapter 6 • The Gang



If you still believe a dog only reacts, only follows its instinct, eats whatever's lying around and doesn't think beyond that — then I have to tell you about the morning with the toast. After this story, no one was ever again able to make me believe that a dog is “just a dog”.

It was a perfectly normal morning. I make myself breakfast, sit down at the living room table, put my toast down in front of me. And think: damn, forgot the jam. So I get up, go into the kitchen, fetch the jam from the fridge. Twenty seconds, maybe. I sit back down, reach for it — and the toast is gone.

Gone. Just gone. I hadn't heard a plate rattle, no smacking, not a crumb lying anywhere. Nothing. I look to my left — and there the two of them sit. Back to back. Pebbels bolt upright, head turned toward the balcony window: birds, how beautifully the birds are flying today. And leaning against her back, Bam Bam, head toward the other window: a car, oh, a car driving past, how interesting. Two completely uninvolved, innocent dogs, each facing their own direction, who just happen to be enjoying the view.

Straight out of a movie. There's no other way to put it.

And then I realized what this little crook had pulled off in twenty seconds. Do the math, step by step, because it's sheer madness.

First: she recognized the moment. I stand up — the window of opportunity opens. She understood immediately: now or never. Second: she got the toast off the table without a sound. No noise, no crumbs. That's precision work. Third — and this is the part that leaves me speechless to this day — she shared it with Bam Bam. Not out of generosity. She made him an accomplice. A partner in crime. Whoever ate along can't snitch; now they both have something to hide. And fourth, the cover: back to back, each looking in a different direction, each playing the innocent dog who's just admiring the view. Toast? What toast?

That's not a dog stealing a piece of bread. That's a master thief with an escape plan, an accomplice and an alibi. In twenty seconds.

I laughed my head off. To this day it annoys me that no camera was running — that would have gone around the world. But the more often I think about it, the less it's about the video. Because what this story shows can't be seen on any camera: not just what she did, but what kind of mind did it.

The most cunning part of it: she knew exactly when she needed an accomplice — and when she didn't. With the toast, she could have been caught; so you pull the other one in, then nobody snitches. But there was also the reverse case.

I had a bar of chocolate lying on the nightstand. Seventy percent, good chocolate. We were out, and when we came back, the bar had been — I can't put it any other way — expertly removed from its packaging. The wrapper opened, the foil neatly unrolled, the chocolate gone. No shreds, no mess. A smoothly executed operation.

I knew right away it was her. And this time there was no accomplice — on the contrary. Bam Bam hadn't gotten the slightest bit. Because seventy percent is simply not something you share. That was loot for her alone, and where there's nothing to share, you don't need anyone to keep quiet either. She calculated it in cold blood: on this heist, the whole take, no witnesses, everything for me.

The only catch was that chocolate is poisonous for a dog. So we had to take both of them to the clinic to be purged — and poor Bam Bam had to suffer along once again, even though this time he hadn't seen a single crumb. That was almost more unfair than usual: with the toast, at least he'd been involved. Here he did his penance completely innocent, for a crime he hadn't even gotten anything out of. The gang's eternal fall guy.

And it was no coincidence, no one-off stroke of genius. She had a partner, and she trained him. In our house there was a baby gate, at the top of the stairs, so the two of them couldn't just go up and down as they pleased. Pebbels figured out how to open that gate. And then — this is the truly unbelievable part — she taught it to Bam Bam. The brains recruit the muscle. She showed him how to break out. To this day, when Bam Bam stands at the gate and opens it, I know: he got that from her. She lives on in that little trick.

There was one more trick involving Bam Bam, and it may be the most cunning of them all. Whenever I went into the kitchen, say, to do something or other, Bam Bam came right after me — hoping for a treat, yum-yum, every single time, no matter whether there was anything to be had at all. In the beginning, Pebbels came too. But later? Tsk. By then she had changed her strategy.

She stayed put in her observer position. Totally cool. First she waited to see what Bam Bam did — whether it was even worth it. And only when the odds were high that there really was something — bam, there she stood, ready, with pinpoint timing. She simply let Bam Bam run first. She used him as a scout, as an early-warning system. Why get up and trot over every single time when most times yield nothing? So she waited for his signal — he reliably dashed off every time, after all — and invested her energy only when a payoff was likely.

That's efficiency. That's a cost-benefit calculation. She used her impulsive brother as an indicator and optimized her own behavior around it. Bam Bam reacts, Pebbels calculates — that was the difference between the two of them, time and time again. Think about what that means: this little creature had grasped that she could spare herself a false alarm by letting someone else do the work. Nobody would ever think a dog capable of that.

That's the pattern, if you look closely: she the brains, Bam Bam the loyal henchman. With the toast, she made him a partner in crime. With the gate, she taught him the trade. And with the treats, she sent him ahead as a scout. Accomplice, apprentice, lookout — she used him for everything. The two of them were a gang, and there wasn't the slightest doubt about who the boss was.

And there was one more member of the family who showed just how closely she kept her little world in view: our cat. She had grown up with Bam Bam and had groomed him her whole life long, whether he wanted it or not — mostly he didn't, hehe. With Pebbels it went differently. Her attitude was clear: you're tolerated, but don't get too close to me. A bit of gentle playing, yes, all right — but in moderation, please.

And God help the cat if she got too close to me. Then came a snap at the air — not vicious, not serious, more a polite notice: don't push it. The loveliest part was the little performance when I sat next to her and the cat came creeping up. First the head up: what's going on here? Then she sat up and watched. And if the cat dared to let herself be petted, at some point Pebbels would get up, walk over, and calmly make it clear: he's mine. No barking, no drama. Just a queen reminding her court whom the human belongs to. Nobody had taught her that. She simply knew it — the way she simply knew so many things.

Now let me tell you why this didn't just make me laugh, but also made me think. Because right here is exactly what most people underestimate about animals.

To deceive someone — to play the innocent dog — you have to understand that the other has a different picture of reality than you do. She knew that I hadn't seen the bread disappear. And she knew she could keep it that way by acting as if nothing had happened. That's not a reflex action. It requires that inside that little head there existed a picture of my head. That's thinking. That's a consciousness that factors in another consciousness.

And making someone an accomplice — sharing loot to bind someone to silence — that's a social strategy we would flat-out call cunning in a human. She had it. And the humor to go with it, because there was something comical about it, that outrageous cheek of the back-to-back innocence pose. That was no random way of sitting. That was a performance.

And here's the special thing about her scams: I don't actually like being played for a fool. With most, I'd get angry. But she pulled it off with so much charm that you simply couldn't be mad at her. That wasn't crude cunning — that was cunning with style. She could get away with things I would have chewed out anyone else for, because she did it with so much elegance and wit that in the end there was nothing left for me to do but laugh and let her keep the trophy.

I know my way around clever animals — I grew up with cats, and cats are a caliber all their own: selfish, sly, crafty. Pebbels had something of that feline finesse, but without the coldness, without the selfishness. Her cunning was never just out for her own gain. Even when she tricked me, there was love in it, this "I'm doing this with you, not against you". The brains of a cat and the heart of a dog — that was her gift. She fooled you so charmingly that you'd have gladly let yourself be fooled.

And the very best part: she practically told me to my face. With her eyes. She didn't have to make a sound — she looked at me, and everything was written in that look: "Yes, it was me. Yes, I fooled you. And you can't even be mad at me." Cheeky, superior, full of mischief, straight from her eyes into my face. It was the same with the pool game — you could see it in her, that sparkle: "Go on, catch me, you won't get me anyway!" She laughed at me with her eyes and challenged me, right in the middle of the game. Her whole personality was in that look — and if you knew her, you could read it like an open book.

I never got it on camera, and for years that bugged me. But maybe it's even better this way. Because now it's here, written down, and you don't just see the act — you understand what kind of creature was behind it. And whoever reads this and still says that was "just a dog" is truly beyond help.

Chapter 7 • The Secret Alliance



She always wanted to sleep in my bed. Always. For her, the bed wasn't one place among many — it was her place, at my side, and with astonishing tenacity she made sure that's where she ended up.

There was just one problem, and its name was snoring. You see, Pebbels and I both snored, taking turns, in a duet, so to speak — practically one continuous drone, all night long. The little bulldog and her human, both sawing logs, in alternation. At some point Nicole emigrated to the living room because of it. So far, so understandable.

But of course there were also the nights when Nicole still slept in the bedroom. And that's where Pebbels' masterpiece began.

She didn't just come running up and jump onto the bed. No. She waited. Very quietly, in the background, until Nicole had fallen asleep. She watched the situation, picked her moment — look look, the old lady's asleep, now I can come. And then she came, soundlessly, and nudged me at the bed. No barking, no whining, nothing that would have woken anyone. Just a soft, discreet little nudge, a secret signal, just for me. And of course I laid her down next to me. What else.

And if I didn't react right away, because I was already half asleep? Then she didn't get louder. No second, more insistent nudge, no whining, no impatience. Then came only a sigh — very soft, very tender, not reproachful, more a gentle way of saying: I'm still here. That was all the reminder she gave me. Never a demand. Just a subtle, patient hint that someone was waiting there and would love to be let in.

But now comes the part you can hardly believe.

She knew exactly what was going on. She had grasped that the snoring was the problem — after all, I had often nudged her myself when she snored. And what did she do with that? Every time she noticed that she herself was starting to snore, she tried to shift into a different position where it got quieter. All on her own. She had understood: if I make noise, the whole plan is blown, then Nicole comes, and I have to go. So she fought her own snoring.

Let that sink in. That's self-awareness — she noticed that she herself was making the noise. That's consideration — she didn't want to wake anyone. And that's problem-solving — she changed position to be quieter. All at the same time, in that little head. And for the rest of the night she didn't stir, quiet as a little mouse, so that Nicole wouldn't notice a thing.

That's why she was so brilliant: she didn't simply follow a rule. She understood the logic behind it — cause and effect — and adjusted her own behavior accordingly, even against her own body.

And you know what the most beautiful part of it is? It wasn't just cunning. It was love. All that effort — the waiting, the quiet sneaking up, the holding still all night, the fight against her own snoring — she took all of it on for one single thing: to be with me. Lying in bed with me was so important to her that she summoned all her craftiness and all her self-control for it. The cunning was in the service of love. She didn't sneak her way in to annoy anyone. She sneaked her way in to be close.

We were accomplices, she and I. A secret alliance, every night anew, against the snoring banishment. She snuck over to me, we shared the night, and Nicole never noticed a thing. There was something deeply conspiratorial about it — she and her human, very quiet, very close, a secret between the two of us.

That's how she got her way. Not with a racket, not with barking. With brains and with heart. She ruled her little kingdom with cleverness and charm — and knew perfectly well that the finest spot in that kingdom was next to me in bed.

Maybe it's no coincidence that later, at the very end, it was the bed again where she wanted to be. It was always her place. Our place. From the first secret night to the last. ## Chapter 8 · Her Thing



Every real personality has its quirks. Pebbels had hers — and one of the most beautiful parts of our life together was that I let her do her thing. That was our deal: she got to be completely herself, with everything that came with it, with all her foibles and principles.

Just take mealtimes. We always fed the two of them together, and it usually went like this: I put the food down — and Pebbels first waited to see what Bam Bam did. He, of course, pounced on his bowl immediately, yum-yum, without wasting a single thought. And her? She sniffed briefly at her own food, then went over to Bam Bam's bowl and inspected it: Is that the same stuff in there? Or did he get something better?

It was only later that I understood what it was, most of the time. Not just greed — an inspection. Quality control. She made sure that everything was above board, that nobody was being favored — and only once that was settled did she go to her own bowl. Bam Bam ate. Pebbels inspected. That says quite a lot about the difference between the two of them. Mostly I let her do her thing, because I could tell it mattered to her.

But honest is honest, I don't want to make her out to be better than she was: sometimes it didn't stop at just checking. Sometimes it was just plain brazen — she'd help herself from his bowl without the slightest shame, and then I did have to step in. Not out of spite; she really didn't begrudge him his food. She just took it because she wanted to and because she could. The little boss, who simply helped herself to whatever she pleased — and who probably also wanted to underline her superiority in the process. And that was long since unnecessary: Bam Bam had

accepted her leadership long ago and never once challenged it. She had to show it anyway. That was her too.

And then the ritual at the end. When Bam Bam was done, his bowl of course had to be licked clean. And every scrap that had fallen beside it had to be cleared away. Her little compulsive streak, if you will. There had to be order, nothing was allowed to be left lying around. We never managed to break her of it — and honestly, we didn't even want to. She had her principles, after all.

And then there was the way she handled needing to go out — that too was a little masterpiece of consideration. When she had to pee, or wanted out, she never simply decided it on her own and took care of it somewhere in the house. She came to me and drew my attention to it, ever so politely — or she sat down at the door and waited patiently until someone came. No yapping, no pushing, no demanding whine. She let me know, and then she waited. She asked; she never demanded. And if I couldn't manage it right away, she simply went on waiting, as long as she possibly could.

And the most astonishing thing came when, for once, she truly couldn't hold it any longer and nobody was home. Even then she didn't just go wherever it happened to suit her. No. She sought out the one spot where it would do the least harm: the boiler room. The plainest, most unremarkable room in the whole house — the place where a mishap was easiest to wipe up and where the least got ruined. No carpet, no living room, nothing important. Just think about that for a moment. Even in her greatest need, even when no human was watching and no one could praise or scold her for it, her first thought was: just don't do any damage, just don't be a burden to anyone. You can't teach a dog something like that. You can't train it in. It came all on its own, out of a decency she simply carried inside her. And if that doesn't say everything about her, then I don't know what does.

And then there was the thing with the table. For some people that would have been begging — for me, never. Begging makes a racket, pushes, pesters. She did none of that. She sat at a dignified distance, perfectly still, and watched. Not a sound, no whining, no nudging. And the best part: the moment she noticed I was busy talking or just didn't have any attention for her, she'd simply lie down under the table. Bam Bam too, by the way. Call it a matter of opinion — for me it wasn't begging but politely being there.

Queens don't beg. They let you know.

We had another little ritual in bed. Every now and then I'd treat myself to a snack there, a little pizza for example — and she always got the little pieces from the crust. That was part of it, that was our thing. She knew exactly when the moment had come, sat down next to me and waited patiently for her share.

Her archenemy was the vacuum cleaner. And she did not keep out of its way — quite the opposite. The moment that thing came on, it didn't matter in the least where she was or what she was doing: she stood at the ready, primed for battle. The monster was attacked right at the front, at the nozzle, determined and brave. Other dogs crawl under the sofa when the vacuum comes out. Not her. She faced the roaring intruder and defended her kingdom. It was the same Pebbels who never backed away from any enemy — the fighter from the stuffed toy, the guardian on the back of the couch — just in her comical, everyday version.

And then there were the tomatoes. Tomatoes, of all things. Those things were one big riddle to her — she'd take one in her mouth, and Nicole and I could literally watch her think: Huh? What is this? Not food, not prey, not a proper toy — kind of weird, a thing like that. And what do you do with something you can't make sense of? She knew: you hurl it around the place. And suddenly the weird tomato was the best toy in the world, and she had the time of her life with it. She never ate a tomato, by the way — eating wasn't the point at all. Tomatoes were for throwing, period. The vacuum cleaner was fought, the jet of water chased, the tomato hurled — she had her very own answer to every riddle in this world.

And since I want to stay honest, the unglamorous side belongs here too. After she'd done her business, wiping her bum was often a must — queen or no queen. And then the classic that still makes me laugh today: the grass-scoot. When the mood took her, she'd zoom clear across the grass on her whole backside and her two little front paws, the rest of her trailing behind — and all the while she'd look so dignified, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. That mix was so completely her: Her Majesty and the little clown in one and the same body.

There was one more quirk we could never break her of — and I often had a quiet laugh at Nicole over it, thinking to myself: yeah, yeah, you go right ahead. On walks she always went in front. Of course she went in front — she was the boss. For me it was never a question of bad training — for me it was simply the natural order from her point of view: whoever leads goes in front. I knew that, and at some point I just accepted it.

Nicole, though, kept on trying. The classic routine: right, now you're going to walk to heel. And what did Pebbels do? For a little while she played along — oh fine, if it really has to be — with that slightly annoyed look that already said: I'll do this for you now, but we both know it won't last. And then she pushed her way forward again, very slowly. Bam, back in the lead. Business as usual. It never lasted long anyway — of course it didn't.

It was the same gentle, stubborn persistence as always. No revolt, no defiance, no growling. Just friendly, unshakable insistence on her will, until everything was back the way she thought it should be. She never had to get loud. She was simply tougher than any attempt at training her. And I let her lead, because I had long since understood: with a personality like that, you're better off swimming with her than against her.

When the doorbell rang, there was no holding her back. Whether two people came or five — she took off like Wild Bill, scurrying around, revving up, until even the last person in the room had noticed her. A blanket hello to everyone didn't count. Every single one had to pay their respects, personally. And the moment the audience was complete, the moment every single person had paid her some attention — all good. Then she settled down, satisfied, as if that was exactly what she'd needed. She held court. A "sit" or any other command didn't stand a chance in those minutes; this was far too important to her. Whoever came in, she had to see them. Non-negotiable.

And then there were the small, tender quirks that made your heart melt. For example, she always sat down like a puppy, in that typical puppy sitting position, even when she was long since grown. Such a little thing, and yet so unmistakably her.

About most things she was astonishingly ready to compromise. Her own feeding spot, her own corner — no big deal, none of that mattered much to her. But there was one thing she did not

joke about: the place next to me. That belonged to her, and to nobody else. There was simply no other way.

If, for example, I ever had Bam Bam in my arms — impossible. And that too was typically her: she never settled it with aggression. No growling, no grumbling, no baring of teeth. She simply wedged herself in between. Very gently, entirely as a matter of course, as if it were the most natural thing in the world: right, I'm here now. This is my place.

Bam Bam and I even had to cuddle in secret. Because cuddling without her — no no, that could not happen. She showed me, in the gentlest way imaginable: you belong to me. Not with threats, not with volume. But with warm, stubborn persistence. She didn't need to tell me I was her human — she just kept pushing herself between me and everything else, until it was clear: this spot is taken.

And you know what that says about her? She was generous about everything — just not about me. I was her red line. Everything else she could share. Not me. And she didn't defend it with force, but with love, by gently and persistently pushing herself in between. That may be the most touching detail of all, because it shows how deep and how exclusive her bond with me was.

These quirks weren't flaws that needed to be fixed. They were her. And loving her meant letting her be all of it — the inspector, the fussy cleaner-upper, the vacuum-cleaner warrior, the puppy in her way of sitting, the gentle, jealous soul who pushed herself between me and the world. I let her do her thing. That was the whole deal, lived out in a hundred little things.

You don't love someone by sanding down their rough edges. You love them by letting the rough edges be. And a dog that gets to be completely itself is a happy dog. That's what she was.

Chapter 9 • Her Watchful Eyes



If you've seen the picture at the beginning of this book, you know her eyes. That look. Everyone who met her saw it right away: she was alert. She was present. She was watching. Nothing escaped her — nothing at all.

And that wasn't just a phrase. With dogs, it's normally like this: they perceive the world above all through their nose and their ears; seeing is usually not their strongest side. That's how I've always known it, anyway. But she was different — and in a way that was almost uncanny.

Whether in the dark or in broad daylight: she saw the smallest details. Things I only noticed myself when I looked very, very closely — if at all. Sometimes she would fixate on something, rigid and attentive, and I'd look in the same direction and see: nothing. Only when I really made an effort would I maybe discover it — a tiny movement, a small animal far in the back,

something at the very edge of the visible. Her eyes caught what mine missed. I've often wondered how much she saw that I've been overlooking all my life.

But it wasn't just the eyes. It was her whole being. She was always awake, always attentive, taking in everything around her and processing it. Think of all the stories: the observer who first checked whether getting up was even worth it. The inspector at the food bowl. The guardian on the back of the couch. It all comes from the same source — a mind that never stopped observing, weighing, thinking along. Her alertness wasn't a state she switched on and off. It was simply always there.

And that's another one of those things that made her more than "just a dog". A perception sharper than the norm. An attentiveness that never went out. And behind those eyes, always, this feeling: someone's home in there. Someone's thinking. Someone's taking it in.

I saw this alertness most beautifully in a little game. A laser dot, the beam of a flashlight, a fleck of light reflected off something somewhere — that sort of thing worked her into a frenzy of excitement; she'd dart through the whole house, Bam Bam always right behind her. But the truly astonishing part wasn't that she chased the dot. It was that she knew exactly where it came from. She never mistook the fleck for some little creature of its own to stalk. She traced it back to its source — to my hand, to the flashlight. She understood that there was an origin. Only one kind of light left even her powerless: reflections, the accidental flash of a watch in the sunlight, for example. Those came out of nowhere, unpredictable, with no hand behind them — those threw even her. But every last tiny point of light in the room, she registered. Nothing, truly nothing, escaped those eyes.

Maybe that's also why that one photo captures her so well. You look at it — and feel looked at. That's no accident of the camera. That was her. That's exactly how she looked at you: direct, present, alert.

Her eyes saw everything. And the one thing I hold on to: they saw me too. Really saw me — the way no one else ever has.

Chapter 10 • The Water



When I want to picture her full of life — really full of life — I think of water. Water was her magnet. The pool, the hose, the sprinkler system. As soon as water was involved, she went wild and had the time of her life.

The pool was her thing through and through. Even while I was setting it up she stood beside me and watched closely to make sure I got it right and did it properly — with the same scrutinizing look she otherwise used to check the bowl. And the filling was a highlight all its own. Water from the hose drew her like nothing else; the moment it was running she was right in the middle of it, chasing after the jet, completely beside herself with joy. Honestly, it was a bit of a battle every time — how are you supposed to fill a pool when someone keeps attacking the jet of water? It did fill up in the end, but nothing happened without a fight. And as for the sprinkler system in the garden: she was constantly after that jet of water, jumping, romping, unable to settle down at all.

And what jumps they were! This little thing made leaps of one and a half to two meters. She jumped up onto everything — onto the chair, onto the high bed, no matter how high, she made it. And if it went wrong the first time, that was no reason to give up. On the contrary: then she was all the more determined to get it done. She kept trying until it worked — and it worked. No “can’t” in her head. Only “not yet.”

The jet of water was her great riddle anyway. Watering the flowers, for example: the jet had to be dealt with. Absolutely. And yet there was nothing to bite, nothing to grab. And I think that’s

exactly what drove her crazy — that darn jet of water, there and yet not there, impossible to catch, impossible to defeat. For a head like hers, one that wanted to see through everything and control everything, it must have been an unsolvable riddle. One of her great ungraspable adversaries, one she never got hold of. And still she tried again every single time.

Not everything she hunted was as ungraspable as the jet of water. There was the cozy counterpart too, indoors, in bed: “catch the mouse.” I’d simply move my fingers under the blanket, this way and that — and for her and Bam Bam it was sheer madness every single time. At last, a “prey” that moved and that you could actually get hold of. The two of them would pounce with burning zeal on the roving bulge in the fabric, and I lay underneath, laughing. A little game, nothing more — but it shows the same lust for the hunt, only this time with a happy ending for the huntress.

The pool itself was another story. When it was set up and it was warm outside, she’d sometimes end up in the water without meaning to. But having no ground under her paws at all — that wasn’t her thing. She was just more the sure-footed type. Cooling off, yes, that was fine. And riding the air mattress like a boat was fine too — the main thing was that she was part of it. Not necessarily swimming. But being there, with me, that’s what mattered to her.

She had her own pool too, of course — a little one, all for herself. Whenever it got too warm again, she’d just hop right in and cool off, exactly to her liking. Bam Bam, on the other hand? The whole water magic left him completely cold. Water — ahhh, no thanks. He preferred to keep a respectful distance from all that wet nonsense. Two dogs, two worlds: her right in the thick of it, beside herself with joy, him dry and perfectly calm beside her.

And then there was our pool game, which is a riddle to me to this day — or rather: today I know it was no riddle at all. It was a game. Me in the pool, her on the outside. She’d jump up at the edge and make a big scene: “HEEELLOO!”, something like that. When I splashed water, that was the high point — you’d always see the whole dog in the air. But as soon as I moved to the edge to get her: whoosh, she was gone. So out of the pool to catch her — no chance, quick as a weasel, the little one. And the moment I was back in the water, there she was again.

Only later did it dawn on me: she was playing with me. In her own way, by her own rules. I was allowed to play along — but she made the rules. Just as she had always roped Bam Bam in, she had now made me her playmate.

And I wasn’t the only piece in her game. Nicole was just as much a part of it. No matter which of us was in the pool and who was around the outside — Pebbels had both of us in view at the same time. Nicole tried everything to sneak up from behind, very quietly, while I distracted her from the front. No chance, not the slightest. Distraction or no distraction, she caught every movement. With the two of us she was even harder to outsmart — she kept the whole garden in view, each of us, the entire time.

At some point I tried something. Whenever I did get hold of her, into the water she came with me — and since having no ground under her paws made her uneasy, that was probably a kind of lesson for her. And what happened? She remembered it instantly. And not just that day. Whether it was a year ago or two — she still knew it exactly. Getting caught means pool, so she didn’t let herself get caught anymore. The trick never worked a second time. She was too smart for that.

So I thought to myself: fine, then we'll do it differently. Not with cunning, but with trust. I coaxed her over to me bit by bit, nice and calm — and when she was there, I just gave her a good scratch. No pool, no throwing her in. Just scratches. And you know what? After that, she knew exactly what I was up to. She could read whether I meant to grab her and carry her into the water or whether I meant it honestly. She recognized the difference between my intentions.

And there it is again, the same as with everything: cunning didn't work on her — she was too clever for that. Trust worked. Always. She noticed what I was planning before I had taken a single step. That's how she was. Even at the pool, even in the middle of a game.

That's how I want to remember her. Not sick, not weak. But alive and kicking, quick as a weasel, the whole dog in the air, beside herself with joy over a jet of water. Full of life.

Chapter 11 • Her Archenemies

Every queen has her enemies. Pebbels had a few of them — and they fell into two groups: the ones she could take on, and the ones that drove her into a fury because she simply never got hold of them.

Let's start with the big ones. She never had much time for big dogs anyway. Once she slipped under the fence and went after the neighbor's two Rottweilers. There was squealing — and we thought: uh-oh. But no. It wasn't Pebbels doing the squealing. It was one of the Rottweilers.

For the sake of honesty, I have to add: they were still young Rottweilers, so not at their full size. But that changes nothing about the heart of the matter. This small, compact bulldog went under the fence and picked a fight with two considerably bigger dogs without a second's hesitation. The size of her opponent didn't matter to her one bit. In her head, she was the biggest in the territory, no matter what the other one weighed. She simply had no fear. Or better put: her confidence was bigger than any difference in size.

But her true archenemy, her Moby Dick, was the neighbor's cat.

That feud was legendary — and tragic, because between the two of them stood that damn fence, which cheated Pebbels out of her reckoning. And the cat, that beast, knew it full well. She'd sit out there in perfect peace, dead relaxed, basically laughing at her: Come on. Come on over, if you dare. And Pebbels went out of her mind. You little rat, just wait till I get you! You could see the desperation on her. The powerlessness must have driven her into a fury. She, who wanted to control and solve everything — and there sat that superior ball of fur, just out of her reach, enjoying it to the fullest.

And you know what the funny thing is? It was exactly the same as with the jet of water. Another opponent she couldn't get hold of — there and yet out of reach. The jet of water with all its ungraspable relatives — the laser dot, the reflected light — and the cat: those were her great unsolved riddles. Both drove her mad, and she never defeated either of them. It's almost the running gag of her life: this little creature who had everything under control — except the two things that flat-out refused to be caught.

With the vacuum cleaner she had it easier. At least it was there, she could grab it, she could go for its nozzle — an enemy you could touch, so to speak. But the cat and the jet of water

remained untouchable. And for a head like hers, one that wanted to solve every problem, nothing was worse than an opponent you can't get hold of.

In the end, her enemies say just as much about her as everything else does. She feared nothing that came within her reach — from the vacuum cleaner to the Rottweiler. And she agonized over the two things that eluded her. That was her through and through: a fighter to the core who simply couldn't bear the thought that anything might be beyond her control.

Chapter 12 • Her Heart

Of everything she was — the guardian, the little thief, the boss who walked out in front — this was the quietest. And, if I'm honest: the greatest.

No sooner had I lain down on the couch than she was there. "Yay, cuddle time!" — you could practically hear it, the way she came bustling over, whoosh, right into my arms. Sometimes she'd simply bury her snout in the crook of my arm, deep down, as if she wanted to disappear inside it. Then she'd lay both little paws on my arm and her head on top — or she'd nestle in with everything she had, into the bend of my arm, and press herself against me, warm and heavy and close. Disappear into it she could not; for that she was far too solid a little chunk, fourteen kilos of packed bulldog. But it never got closer than in those moments.

In bed she had her own quiet way of asking. She'd sit there, look at me, and then came the paw — ever so gentle, a silent request. I'd lift the blanket, and she'd nestle in beside me. No barking, no pushing. Just the paw and the look. She never had to do more.

But the image I'll never forget is a different one. She'd be lying in my lap, and then she'd roll onto her back, belly up, eyes closed, all fours in the air. Completely defenseless. And I'd scratch her belly, just the way she loved — I have so many pictures of that I can't even count them.

You have to understand what that means, and with her especially. A dog only gives up its belly when it trusts a hundred percent. Belly up means: I'm helpless, and I don't care, because I know that nothing will happen to me here. And now think about where she came from — out of a garage, cast out by her own mother and locked away, in a place where she couldn't rely on a single human. A beginning like that teaches a creature to be wary, never to hand itself over. And she, of all beings, closed her eyes with me and bared her belly. Trust cannot be greater than that. She didn't tell me she loved me — she showed me, with the most vulnerable thing she had.

And then I'd always kiss her on her tender little belly. That was part of it, that was our thing.

And one thing was so sweet that it still makes me smile today. When she'd slept a while in the crook of my arm and woke up again, she'd sometimes notice that she had drooled on me a little in her sleep. And then? Then she'd lick it clean again, good as gold. As if she wanted to apologize — "Oops, sorry." Such a little creature, and so much decency, even half asleep.

That was her heart. No training could ever have produced it, no command, no deal. It was simply there — from her, for me. And that's what I hold on to today: she didn't give me her heart because I had earned it. She gave it to me because that was her way of loving — wholly, unconditionally, with everything she was. # PART THREE — What I Came to Understand

Now that the world knows her: what she taught me — and what I only see looking back.

Chapter 13 • She Trained Me

I came to her with the thought probably everyone has: now I have a dog, now I have to train it. I have to show it who calls the shots. It took me a long time to grasp how backwards that was. I didn't train her. She trained me. And, honestly, rightly so.

I noticed it most clearly in something that's really just a small thing, and that still amazes me to this day whenever I think about it: giving paw.

It was in the kitchen at some point, I had a treat in my hand and thought to myself: let's give it a try. I showed her the treat and held out my hand. First she just looked at me. "Huh? What's this? What's up?" No clue what I wanted from her. I did it three, four times. And then — then came the paw. And then the treat. From then on, it worked.

I didn't take her paw and put it on my hand. I didn't guide her. I just held out my hand and waited, and she figured out for herself what I wanted. That's a difference. She didn't learn by rote. She read me and found the solution herself.

But that wasn't the amazing part yet. The amazing part came afterwards. She figured out which paw. Right hand — left paw. Left hand — right paw. She understood that the answer wasn't simply "paw," but that the position of my hand determined which paw was up. That's not a memorized trick anymore. That's a rule with a variable. She saw through a connection, she didn't just remember a command. Now try telling me dogs are dumb.

And Bam Bam? He watched a few times — and then he could do it too. Not once did I teach him. He picked it up from her, just like opening the gate before. Always the same: she showed how it was done, he followed suit. The little boss and her big pupil.

The lovely thing about this story, compared to her capers: the toast, the chocolate — that was her wits against me, sly, for her own loot. But giving paw was communication with me. A little game we developed together, a conversation without words. I hold out my hand, she answers with the right paw. That's understanding between two beings who don't share a language — and understand each other anyway. Almost more touching than all her cleverness, because it shows how connected we were.

There was the other side too, especially in the beginning. A few bad habits. Chewing on the wooden table, for example. That meant trouble the next day. And here comes the point where I contradict the common talk: "A dog doesn't even know the next day what it did." She did. She knew exactly why she was in trouble. You could see it on her. And she never did it again.

I saw it even more clearly with Nicole's slippers than with the wooden table. She was attached to those summer slip-ons of hers, and Pebbels was attached to them too — just in her own way, as something to chew on. The things were just too tempting. And then days went by. Not the next morning — days. At some point Nicole took the chewed-up slippers, went over to her, and gave her a talking-to, with words alone. And you'll hardly believe it: Pebbels knew immediately what it was about. You could see it on her. She connected the chewed-up slippers from back then with the anger of now, across several days. That's not dog memory anymore. That's understanding.

And when I really think about it: in a whole dog's life, those were the only two things we ever had to wrestle over at all — the wooden table and Nicole's slippers. Two. That's all. Everything else she knew entirely on her own. People like to call that training, but that doesn't get it right. Training is when you teach a dog what the human wants. With her it was something else: she did what was right because it was right, not because I demanded it. That's not obedience. That's decency. And decency can't be drilled into anyone — you either come with it or you don't. She came with it, from the very beginning.

I know what the experts say: a punishment that comes too long after the deed does a dog no good, because it no longer connects the trouble to the offense. As a rule, that's even true. But she was never the rule. And above all, that's something completely different from the claim that a dog no longer knows what it did. She knew. And she understood what I didn't want, and she stuck to it. That's not a dumb animal reacting on reflex. That's a being that learns, understands, and decides.

You often hear that you have to defeat a dog, dominate it, so that it respects you. Bullshit. She had respect for me — real, deep respect. But not because I ever broke her. Because there was trust between us. She knew exactly where her limits were, she knew exactly when enough was enough and when it was time — and not out of fear, but because we understood each other. That's the difference no dog trainer could ever have taught me as clearly as she did: respect doesn't come from defeating. It comes from trust.

And she didn't have this respect only for me. For Nicole just the same, for everyone who came through the door. But — and this is the clever part — she read each person individually. With each one she knew exactly how far she could go. With me the line was more elastic, because she'd seen right through me, the softer one. With Nicole the line sat tighter. That's not training, where one cowers and the other commands. That's a being that reads people and adjusts to each individual. The clever little mouse.

And honestly: I myself wasn't always as in control as this makes it sound. I tried often enough to rein her in — afraid that in her overeagerness she might run off or pick a fight with the wrong dog; the business with the Rottweiler was still in my bones. My trust wasn't always at a hundred percent. Today I see it differently; I could well have trusted her more. And when nothing else worked, I'd just outsmart her — lured her into the garage, her coming after, bam, door shut, a few minutes of peace. She complained, of course. She never held it against me. Not once. The garage of all places, which had once been such a cold place for her — with me it was nothing but a transparent trick, one she'd get briefly indignant about and forget the next moment. She knew she was safe with me.

I came to her to teach her the world. I left as someone she had taught the world to. She showed me how to read another being without it speaking. She taught me that intelligence isn't tied to words. And she opened my eyes once and for all to what a dog really is — not a subordinate, not a toy, but a counterpart. Since her, I see dogs with completely different eyes. Maybe that's the greatest thing she left me: not just the memory of her, but a new way of seeing her kind.

She trained me. And I'm grateful to her for every lesson.

Chapter 14 • Why She Was the Way She Was

Now that she's gone, I sometimes sit here and think about her. About all the little things that made her who she was. And over time something has become clear to me that I didn't see back then: none of it was coincidence. All her peculiarities, all the quirks I'd puzzled over, laughed at, and sometimes gotten annoyed by — they belonged together. They had one common reason.

When I look back now, I see a single thread running through all of it: she wanted to understand the world and keep it in order. Nothing was allowed to stay unresolved for her, nothing uncontrolled, nothing left to chance. She wasn't a dog who just stumbled through life. She was a mind that wanted to size everything up, see through it, and sort it out.

And suddenly it all makes sense. The inspection at Bam Bam's bowl was quality control — everything had to be above board. That she always walked out in front wasn't disobedience but leadership; the boss goes in front. Every visitor had to be checked one by one: who are you, do you belong here? With other dogs, on the leash she was beside herself, because she wanted to settle the matter and the leash kept her from it. She even attacked the vacuum cleaner — that loud monster that invaded her territory and that she therefore had to put in its place. And that she didn't like having no ground under her paws in the water fits just as well: where she didn't have the situation under control, she didn't feel comfortable.

It shows most beautifully in her great riddle, the one she never got a handle on: the jet of water. Here was something she could clearly see, something that challenged her — and that still could never be caught. For a mind that wanted to control everything, that must have been sheer madness. And that's exactly why it never let her go, her whole life long. Of all things, what escaped her control most stubbornly became her greatest passion.

And where did all of it come from? A part of it, I believe, reaches all the way back to the beginning, back to the garage. A being that had to learn early on that no one comes when you call, that you can't rely on anything — a being like that takes matters into its own hands. It controls what it can control, because it once lost everything. Maybe her endless checking and sorting out was, deep down, the armor of a little soul that never wanted to feel at anyone's mercy again.

And because I understood her this way, there was one thing I very deliberately never did: train her quirks out of her. Her fearlessness, for example — this picking fights with dogs three times her size — out of worry, I would have loved to break her of it. But how? I couldn't explain it to her; no dog understands a "let it go, he's bigger than you." The only method would have been to let her have a bad experience, to let her fall flat on her face once, really hard. And that was exactly what I couldn't bring myself to do. Because a bad experience could have turned into fear, and fear would have broken the very thing that made her who she was — again, just like back at the very beginning. So I preferred to let her be the biggest, even if by size she wasn't. So she was the biggest, and that was that. Her fearlessness and her quirks were two sides of the same coin; you couldn't iron out the one without damaging the other. And her unbroken courage was worth more to me than my own peace of mind.

And if that's true, then it makes what was between us only greater. Because in this whole world that she had to keep such a tight grip on, there was one single place where she gave up control. That was me.

I noticed it most clearly when I teased her — and I loved teasing her, precisely because I knew her so well. She'd sit upright next to me on the couch, I'd needle her a little from the side, and she'd growl. But quietly, gently, without the slightest seriousness — a game, not a fight. A quiet “eh” from me was enough, no loud word, and she'd roll onto her back, climb into my lap, and put on her very finest good girl. That's how we settled our little disagreements: no stress at all, no harshness, with a wink. With many another dog, teasing like that could have ended differently. With her I was a hundred percent sure every second: she would never bite me. There was too much trust between us for that. Biting simply wasn't a possibility.

With me she didn't have to sort anything out, didn't have to check anything, didn't have to guard anything. With me she didn't have to be the boss — she could just be my little mouse. The little queen who watched over the whole world laid down her crown with me. And that was her greatest gift: not her cleverness, not her watchfulness, but that she of all beings, the one who had to have everything under control, trusted me enough to let go.

Chapter 15 • Dogs Live in the Now

There's one thing I only really grasped through her, and today it gives me a quiet kind of comfort: dogs live in the now. Not in the past, not in the future. In the moment. They don't have that constant calculating back and forth in their heads that makes life so hard for us humans. And I don't think that's a shortcoming. I think it's a gift.

I saw it most clearly in a story I still have to smile about today. We were in Dubai for two weeks, and the two of them — Pebbels and Bam Bam — stayed with our friend Anja, who had dogs of her own, a whole little pack. I missed those two like crazy. For two weeks I looked forward to the reunion like a little kid, imagining how they'd nearly fall over with joy when they saw me.

And then came the big moment. I arrive, she sees me — and yes, she comes running, delighted, a quick, warm “Hello!” And then? Whoosh, she turns around and she's back in the pack. Well, well, I thought — and then I had to laugh after all. Because what looked like indifference was in truth the loveliest thing you could wish for: she'd simply had a wonderful time the whole two weeks. She was safe, she was looked after, she was happy through and through. She had no reason at all to miss us. (Thank you, Anja.)

And then something became clear to me. We humans would have spent those two weeks in longing, in dread, counting the days. Not her. She was simply fully present every single day, wherever she was. No brooding over yesterday, no fear of tomorrow.

And if I'm honest today, that is exactly the quietest comfort I draw from her whole life. A being that lives in the now doesn't torment itself with what's coming. She didn't spend weeks sensing what was heading her way. She didn't count each day at the end the way I did. She was simply there, with me, entirely in the moment — right to the last. Maybe that's the greatest wisdom such a little dog carries within: that life only ever takes place now. And that now is enough.

Chapter 16 • Never a Whimper

In all those years, she never showed it when she was feeling bad. Never. No whimpering, no sound of complaint, no whining for attention. She simply toughed everything out. The little thing always toughed everything out.

Once she had some kind of bacteria, a nasty business, she was in really rough shape. And what did she do? No drama. She drank a lot. Went out into the garden on her own to throw up — out the front, then out the back nothing but water. And at some point she simply keeled over. That's how sick she was. And still: not a single sound of complaint. She didn't lie down and whine. She still went out into the garden to do it properly, and then her body knocked her over. Only the collapse gave it away. Never her voice.

This silence has a reason, I think, and a big part of it is the breed. Bam Bam is just the same. These French bulldogs are tough, stoic little dogs. They tough everything out, they carry their pain around without showing it. It's almost typical of the breed — and honestly, it's also a reason you have to be doubly careful with them. Because they simply don't show it when something's wrong. They suffer in silence.

With her, it was probably both at once. The tough nature of the breed. Her own fighter's character, the same one that would rather tear the stuffed toy apart than let go. And maybe a leftover from where she came from — a dog rejected by her own mother and locked away learns early that complaining brings no one, that you carry pain alone. That's the touching and slightly sad thought in it: that at some point she had learned to keep her suffering to herself. And that she then did so her whole life, with a dignity you rarely see even in people.

I saw this pride most clearly in one little story, at a point when she was already not doing well. Once she came storming in from the garden, a blade of grass up her nose, sneezing her head off. I was over there in a flash to help her — but she just wouldn't stop. She got so worked up about it that her blood sugar dropped and she buckled for a moment. And what nearly broke my heart in the middle of it: she looked at me as she sneezed, and she was visibly embarrassed. She was embarrassed that she wasn't in control of herself. I swallowed my own alarm and simply calmed her. Such a proud little dog. Because shame presupposes pride, and pride presupposes a self — and she had both, right to the last.

And there's another layer still, one that makes her silence not colder but warmer. Her way of never letting anything show was not only bravery. It was also pride and, as strange as it sounds, a guilty conscience. Even the one time she had to throw up in the house because there was simply no other way, it embarrassed her; you could see she was ashamed, as if she'd done something wrong. When of course she'd done nothing wrong. She simply didn't want to be a burden to anyone, not even when she was sick. And in moments like that I always crouched down to her and said: "Not your fault, little mouse." Because she needed to hear it. Because a soul that apologizes even for its own weakness needs exactly that: for someone to tell it that it has nothing, nothing at all, to make up for.

If I could have, I would have taken some of that burden off her. But I don't think she would have wanted that at all. She carried it herself, quietly, bravely, with dignity — the way she carried everything. That bravery is one of the things I loved most and admired most about her.

The little thing always toughed everything out. Until that one time, when she really couldn't anymore. # PART FOUR — The Farewell

Her ending belongs to her as much as everything else.

Chapter 17 • When It Got Serious

I work a lot, and usually late. Evenings at the office often run long, and she was always there — under the desk, next to my chair, somewhere close to me. And at some point, when it had gotten late yet again, she'd come over to my chair and look at me. I knew right away what that look meant: "Hello. It's late. Shall we go to bed?" There she was again, the clever little mouse, managing her human.

Sometimes I listened to her, and we went to bed together — sometimes quite officially, when Nicole was sleeping elsewhere, sometimes unofficially, our old secret alliance. And sometimes I'd say: "Let me just finish this, little mouse." That was fine with her too. Then she'd lie down next to me and wait. Patiently. No fussing, no pestering, no offended sighing. She simply waited until we finally went to bed together. She told me her opinion — and still let me take my time. That was the trust between us, poured into one tiny, everyday gesture.

I'm telling you this because the bed was our place from the very beginning. And because that's what it remained at the end, when things got hard.

Because at some point, it got serious. I'm not going to write about the illness in this chapter, not about diagnoses and numbers — that belongs somewhere else, not in a book about her. I want to tell you about something else here. About who she was during that hard time. Because the most astonishing thing about those weeks wasn't how sick she got. It was how much she still thought of us anyway.

During that time she constantly had to go out, often in pain, sometimes six, seven times, and usually nothing came at all in the end. You could tell it tormented her. And she could tell it weighed on me too. And what did this little creature do? When it went well for once, when it was quick, she'd come over to me afterwards, specially, plant herself in front of me and look at me: "Look, I'm already back." As if she wanted to tell me: don't worry, this time I was quick, this time everything's fine. In the middle of her own misery, she comforted me. She thought about my feelings while she herself was doing badly.

Because she had to go so often, we put down pads. And no one had to explain to her what they were for — she understood it on her own, immediately. She went onto them and did it right there, at least most of the time. She was sick, after all, it didn't always work, but she tried hard to do it right. That was consideration too: she didn't want to make a mess, didn't want to be a burden to us. The same dignified little soul, right to the last.

And then there was something that hurts my soul to this day — and that I have to tell anyway, because it shows how deep her trust was. Because she wore a sensor that was meant to protect her, we had to make her territory smaller; otherwise she'd rub against the fence. For the guardian, whose whole pride was watching over and controlling things, that was a quiet loss. And when I then sent her into the house sternly, often with an air of "right, you're going inside now," as if she had done something wrong — she always looked at me so humbly. And she hadn't done anything wrong at all.

For a long time I wondered whether she understood. And today I believe: the reason — the sensor, the protection — she couldn't grasp. But the most important part she understood very well. She understood that the boundary came from me, from her human. And that humble look

was no reproach. It was trust. She complied without knowing the reason, simply because it was me. That's the greatest trust there is: to comply without understanding, because you believe the other one. I took a small freedom from her to protect her — and she accepted it because she trusted me.

But the heart of that time was the bed. In those hard weeks I brought her in with me, just the two of us. And she felt mega comfortable there. I'm convinced it gave her strength — not lying alone, not in the basket with Bam Bam, but with her human, in her favorite place in the world. She enjoyed her throne with every fiber of her being. Finally fully in her place, safe at my side.

And in those weeks she showed me how loving she really was — completely, holding nothing back. When I got up in the morning and she didn't feel like getting up yet, she'd curl up in my hollow, right in the warm spot where I had lain, and keep my place warm. She wanted to be where I had been, wanted to hold on to my warmth. And earlier, when she was still well and it wasn't too warm, she liked best to crawl all the way under my blanket to sleep, close against me, into our little cave. As close as possible. From the secret sneaking in of the first years to the cave under the blanket — it was always the same need: to be with me, right up close.

And now I have to say something honest, even if it's hard for me. It was only in those last weeks that I truly took in the full scope of her personality. Only then, in that closeness, did I become fully aware of what kind of being had been lying next to me all those years.

For a long time I blamed myself for that — why only now, why only at the end? But by now I believe that would be unfair to myself. Because the love was there the whole time, for twelve years, in every scratch, every evening together, every night. What came late wasn't the love. It was the conscious recognition. And that came because in those weeks we were closer than ever — without the everyday, without distraction, without life's constant onward, onward. Only when everything went quiet did I truly stop and look. Not because I was blind before. But because life rarely lets you look that closely. And if this book has one single request of you, it's this: look now. Not just at the end.

In the hardest time, we looked after each other, each in our own way. I tried to ease her suffering — and she, in the middle of her own suffering, thought of me. That's how we always were. There for each other, right to the end.

Chapter 18 • Seven Weeks



There are seven weeks in my life I will never forget. I sensed back then that we didn't have much time left together — and maybe she sensed it too. We didn't talk about it, of course not. But there was something in the air, a quiet understanding that every day counted now.

And the strange thing about those weeks: they weren't only sad. In their own way they were also precious — as precious as almost nothing before. Everything unimportant fell away, and what was left was the two of us. And precisely because everything became so quiet, I saw things in her in those weeks that might otherwise have escaped me.

Her blood sugar had to be measured constantly during those weeks. And while I did it I noticed something that moves me to this day: when I measured, she didn't look at what I was doing. She looked at me. Every time. She waited for my reaction — and read off my face whether everything was all right. Numbers meant nothing to her. My face did. I was her readout. And when I then said to her, "Great, all okay" — she lay back down and slept peacefully again. Just like that. Question asked, answer received, answer believed. The little mouse who had read everyone her whole life now read off me how things stood with her. And my word was enough for her.

And I noticed something else in those weeks, and it made me go completely quiet. Her whole life she was alert, even in her sleep. When she was sleeping and someone touched her — bam, instantly awake, head up, checking: Who's there? Ah — all okay. The guardian never really clocked off. But in those last weeks that faded. No more twitching, no more startling awake. You could touch her, stroke her, tuck her in — she just slept on, deeper and sounder than ever before. To this day I don't know why. Maybe it was the illness that took the strength for it out of her. But maybe — and I wish this with everything I have — she could finally lay down that watchful, jumpy piece of herself right at the end, because for the first time she felt completely

safe. Secure, no ifs or buts. I don't know. But I know where she slept so deeply: with me. And that's enough for me.

We made the most of those weeks, as best we could. Closeness, quiet, being together. Nothing big, nothing spectacular — just being there, together. And when she felt a little better on a given day, that was a gift I treasured like nothing else. I learned to find happiness in the smallest things: a quiet afternoon, a moment when she lay relaxed beside me, a flash of her old high spirits.

One thought hurt especially in those weeks, as small as it sounds: summer was just around the corner — and summer was her time. Filling the pool was her big celebration every year, her greatest water-joy. This one summer she didn't live to see. She left just as it was beginning.

Seven weeks. Not enough. Seven years wouldn't have been enough either. But they were our seven weeks, and in them was as much love as fits into a whole life.

Chapter 19 • A Very, Very Long Sleep



This is the chapter I least wanted to write. And the one I have to write, because it belongs here — because her farewell is just as much a part of her as everything else, and because, as hard as it was, it is the last and deepest proof of our love.

On her last day we were downstairs in the office, she and I. She was calm, she wasn't afraid, she was simply with me. And every half hour she woke, lifted her head and looked for me — to see if I was still there. Every time I said to her, "Still here, little mouse. It's all right." And then she settled. She just needed to know that her human was still there.

That day I tried everything. Over and over. I didn't want to give up on her, not one minute too soon. But nothing helped anymore. Her body had no strength left, no matter what I did. And at some point I had to stop thinking about myself — about my wish to keep her with me a little longer — and think only of her. Of her suffering. Of the fact that it wouldn't be right to let her fight any longer.

There in the office came the moment I will see before me forever. I had sat down in the chair, and I was crying — I just couldn't help it anymore. And then she raised herself up one more time, sat down in front of me, upright as ever, and looked deep into my eyes. The way she had spoken with me her whole life, without a single word. Only this time the look was deeper than ever before — for one heartbeat I felt our two souls as one.

For a long time I believed that look had been asking me for help. I was wrong. She wasn't asking me for help — she was comforting me. She saw that I was crying. And even though her own little body had long since given out, even though she was the one who was leaving, she came to me one more time. Not so that I would hold her — but so that she could hold me. In all her suffering, her first thought was me. That is the greatest thing one being can give another.

I had to pull myself together, harder than ever before. Because I wanted to be strong for her. And through my tears I said to her, "Little mouse, I can't help you anymore. Except by going to sleep. Sleeping for a very, very long time. The thing the two of us love doing most." And I kissed her very gently on her nose. I translated what was coming into our own language — into the most familiar and most beautiful thing we had, our thousand shared nights, our secret alliance. So that nothing strange and cold would be the last thing she understood, but something warm. Something of ours.

It was Whit Monday, a holiday. I wanted her to be allowed to go at home — here with us, in her own place. But that couldn't be arranged that day; in the end there was only Elversberg. And the hours until then, I didn't just wait them out — I dragged them out, on purpose. Of course I did. Because between the crashes there kept coming a small moment I could hold on to — a flash in which she was, once again, entirely herself. And on my lap she didn't tremble — otherwise the shaking would run through her whole body in her sleep, but with me she was calm, there she was safe. And in between, again and again, the low blood sugar that simply would not lift anymore. I held on to every single one of these little glimmers of light, as long as I could — these last hours with her I wouldn't trade for anything in the world.

In those hours there were even little sparks that almost tore my heart apart. She actually wanted to play for a bit. In the middle of everything. And her nose was bothering her again — three days earlier she'd come in from the garden with a blade of grass up her nose and had

been sneezing hard ever since. Such a small, everyday annoyance, in the middle of the hardest day. Almost comforting, how much she was simply herself right to the end.

We also sat together on the balcony one more time. It was the start of summer, the air was turning really warm and soft for the first time that year, and we smelled the first summer breeze together. Just the two of us, very calm, very close. I watched her holding her nose up into the wind and thought: Remember this. This one breath of summer we still shared. It was the last of summer she got to take in — a warm, peaceful moment at my side.

And then came one more glimmer of hope, so small and so big at once. I had pasta salad, and she wanted to try some. Maybe, I thought, maybe there's still some strength left after all. But in the end she mostly just licked at it, and the little bits of meat ended up on my trousers. That was when I probably knew for good. It wasn't appetite anymore. It was only her good will, her last bit of playing along. But I'm grateful for that moment, for that little spark she gave me one more time.

It was only later, when she could barely hold herself up anymore, that we set off — to Elversberg. Nicole drove — that way I had both arms for her. I had to gather all the strength I had left and think only of her; otherwise I never would have managed it. And that drive is the image that, for me, sums up everything she was. The whole time I held her tight — sitting upright, proud and unbowed. And again and again she briefly gave way, her body let go of her, again and again — and every time I held her up again, upright, upright. I wanted her to be allowed to go as what she had been her whole life. Not slumped, not a broken little heap. As herself.

Think back to the beginning. To the garage, to the kennel, to the cold four walls where they wanted to make her small. And then think of this drive: of my arms holding her to the last second. That is the whole arc of her life in a single gesture. She left as a queen — because I held her as a queen. Because I kept for her the dignity that no one was ever going to take from her again, right up to the very last breath.

In Elversberg she was allowed to fall asleep. Peacefully, without pain, with us. She didn't go alone, not in fear. She went in the arms of love — with my kiss on her nose, my voice in her ear, held to the last. I held back my own pain so that she could go calmly. That was the last thing I could still do for her. She trusted me her whole life and gave me her unconditional love. We were there for each other — to the very end, to the last breath.

She never deceived me with a whimper — and in the end, when I was crying, she raised herself up one more time to comfort me. There was only one way left for me to give her something back: I held her, upright. It was the hardest thing I have ever done. And it was love in its purest form — hers and mine.

Chapter 20 • The Black Hole

No one tells you how quiet it gets afterward.

You think you know what's coming. You think you're prepared. But you're not. The loss doesn't come as one big pain that you get through once and then it's over. It comes in a thousand small stabs, every day, everywhere. The empty spot next to me. The bowl that no longer gets

inspected. The place in the bed that stays cold. The soft little nudge in the night that no longer comes. It's the small things that knock you over, not the big ones.

I still feel her everywhere. Her smell. The weight of her when she nestled against me. Her paw on my arm. My body knew her for twelve years, and it hasn't yet grasped that she's no longer here. Sometimes, for a fraction of a second, I think I feel her beside me — and then the memory comes, and with it the pain, all over again.

Sometimes a single step into the garden is enough. There stands her pool from last summer — and now it stays empty forever. The water, of all things, her greatest joy, the place where she was most alive. That's when it hits you how much she's missed: not in one spot, but in every one. Everywhere, and endlessly.

And then there are the moments that are almost a bitter joke. The neighbor's cat, for example — her old archenemy, who in Pebbels' lifetime would never have dared come over the fence. No sooner was Pebbels gone than this cat started to expand her territory. First she strolled through the garden without a care. And then, one day, she sat in the middle of our living room as if she owned the place. In Pebbels' realm. On the territory that my little one had guarded with every fiber for twelve years. She would turn in her grave if she knew.

As small and silly as that sounds — it broke my heart. Because it shows so clearly what's missing. It's not only me who misses her. Even the order in the territory has collapsed. The guardian is gone, and the world she kept in check was the first to notice. The post on the back of the couch stays empty — and the cat knows it.

The hardest part is something I couldn't put into words for a long time. I like being alone. I always have. Being alone and being lonely are two different things for me — I don't need constant company, I feel good in my own quiet. And yet her absence hits me to the core. For a long time I didn't understand why. Until I realized: it's not the company I miss. It's a certainty.

The whole time, all those years, I knew deep inside: someone is there. No matter what comes. Not as a constant presence, but as a solid foundation in the background, a quiet, sure knowledge that I'm not entirely alone in the world. Pebbels was that certainty in its purest form. She was closeness that never became a burden, connection without a price, a being I never had to explain myself to. For someone who likes being alone, she was the most precious thing of all: company that never once felt like a weight. And that is exactly what I lost with her — and nothing can replace it. That's brutal.

I don't want to pretend here that I've already found comfort. I haven't, not entirely. Some days are up and down — one moment I'm full of pride in her, the next the grief knocks me over again. That's just how it is, I suppose. I have to get through it. You can't skip a loss like this, can't think it away, can't shorten it. You can only walk right through the middle of it, stab by stab, day by day. And I'm walking through it, because she was worth it. Because the pain is only the price for something that was priceless.

It hurts so much because it was so beautiful. The pain and the love come from the same source. And as long as it hurts, I know: it was real. It was big. She was worth it.

Chapter 21 • What Remains

At the beginning of this book I said: this is not a book about a dog. Now, at the end, maybe you understand why.

Because it was never about a dog. It was about a being with a character, with a will, with a cleverness and a love you rarely meet — in animal or human. It was about a little personality who began in a garage, locked away and cast out, and who never broke all the same. Who from there became the queen of her own little realm. Who stole and deceived and ruled and protected and loved, every day, with everything she had. That was Pebbels. And she was never just a dog.

I want to be honest, including with myself: it was late, far too late, before I fully grasped what I had there at my side. The love was always there, all those years. But the full recognition came only at the end. And that is the reason I wrote this book. Not only to hold on to her. But so that it doesn't turn out the same way for you.

Because that is the one big request I have of you — the only one that really matters to me. If you have an animal, a dog, a cat, whatever it is that lies beside you: look at it. Really look at it. Not as an “animal,” not as a given that's simply there. But as the being it is — with its own mind, its own quirks, its own way of loving you. Most animals are far more than we see. We just don't see it, because we don't look. Everyday life won't let us look. And then at some point it's too late, and only in hindsight do we recognize what we had.

Look now. While your animal is still here, warm and alive beside you. Pause, at least now and then, and look closely at who it is that's with you. That is the gift Pebbels can give you through this book — that you see your own companion with different eyes, today, now, and not only once he's gone. If this book does that for a single person, then even after her death she will have changed something. And I never wished for more than that.

What remains of her? She remains in me, as long as I live — every look, every quirk, every night in our bed. She remains in Bam Bam, who still opens the gate she taught him. And now she remains here, in these pages, for people who never knew her and who through her might see their own animal a little better. The cancer wanted to wipe her out. But it didn't manage that. Her story doesn't belong to it. It belongs to her. And now it belongs to you too, you who are reading this.

She came from a place where they wanted to make her small. Her own mother cast her out, people locked her away, and in the end she fought an enemy stronger than all of them. And through all of it she never became one thing: broken. Not in the garage. Not in the kennel. Not even in dying. She left as the one she had always been — unbroken, proud, utterly herself.

The cancer defeated her body. It never defeated her. Nothing ever did.

She gave me the greatest gift there is. In her last hour, she herself would have needed comfort most of all. Instead, she comforted me. That was the proof: a dog loves unconditionally, to the last breath. And next to that love, everything else suddenly becomes very small.

Appendix • Just a Dog? What Science Says

This book is a personal account, not a scholarly text. But I know that some readers will think: here's someone who humanized his dog, someone grieving who credits his animal with abilities it can't possibly have. Against that doubt I want to set something at the end — not feeling, but research.

Because the astonishing thing is: almost everything Pebbels does in this book lines up with what modern behavioral research actually believes dogs are capable of. I didn't make it up. I observed a clever animal closely — and what I saw is in line with what scientists around the world have discovered about dog cognition. Here are the most important points, each with the scene from her life that goes with it.

1. She understood what I didn't see (perspective-taking)

In the toast theft, Pebbels picked exactly the moment I looked away. That's no coincidence. The cognitive scientist Juliane Kaminski (University of Portsmouth) and colleagues showed in controlled experiments that dogs prefer to take forbidden food when the human can't see it — in the dark, for example. So dogs take into account what a human can and cannot perceive. That is a precursor to what research calls "Theory of Mind": a sense that the other person has a different state of knowledge than one's own.

2. She could deceive

The innocent pose after the theft was no accidental snapshot. Marianne Heberlein and colleagues (University of Zurich) demonstrated in 2017 that dogs can deliberately mislead a human in order to reach their goal — they led an "uncooperative" human to the wrong food spot on purpose, for instance. Deception requires that an animal wants to influence the picture of reality in the other's head. That is exactly what she did.

3. Bam Bam learned from her (social learning)

That Bam Bam picked up opening the gate and giving a paw from her is a textbook case of observational learning. The research group around Friederike Range, Zsófia Virányi and Ludwig Huber (Wolf Science Center / Vetmeduni Vienna) has shown many times that dogs learn by watching their own kind and can imitate actions — right up to the deliberate "Do as I do" copying of human movements. Dogs are social learners, not mere obedience machines.

4. She read my mood (emotion recognition)

That she noticed when something was weighing on me — and reacted with her "Look, I'm already back" — is more than imagination. Natalia Albuquerque and colleagues showed in 2016 (Biology Letters) that dogs combine a person's facial expression and tone of voice into an overall picture of their emotion — an ability long attributed only to humans. Dogs read our feelings, often more precisely than we realize.

5. She controlled herself (impulse control)

That she suppressed her own snoring so as not to give away the secret plan, and waited patiently at the pool instead of charging off, shows self-control. Evan MacLean, Brian Hare

(Duke University) and a large research consortium demonstrated in 2014 (PNAS) that dogs possess measurable impulse control — the ability to suppress an immediate stimulus in order to reach a goal. That is exactly what she did, even against her own body.

6. She understood rules, not just commands

With giving a paw, she grasped that my right hand called for the left paw and vice versa — not simply “paw,” but a rule with a condition. In learning research this is called conditional discrimination: the correct response depends on the context. That is a considerably higher achievement than merely memorizing a single command, and it proves that dogs grasp connections, not just stimuli.

7. She communicated through her gaze (referential communication)

Her whole life she “spoke” with her eyes — right up to her last look. The founders of modern dog cognition research, Ádám Miklósi and József Topál (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest), have shown that dogs respond to human gaze and pointing gestures in a unique way and even use eye contact deliberately to communicate with us — an ability that not even our closest relatives, the chimpanzees, possess in this form. The gaze between human and dog is a genuine channel of communication.

8. She didn’t complain (hiding pain)

That she hid pain and illness almost to the very end is not an isolated case but is well explained by behavioral biology. As descendants of pack animals, dogs tend not to show weakness openly — in nature, weakness makes you vulnerable. Veterinary medicine has long pointed out that dogs (and especially stoic, compact breeds) mask pain for a long time, which is why owners and vets have to watch for subtle signs. Her silence was not an absence of feeling. It was concealment — out of pride and dignity, to the very end.

An honest word at the close of this appendix: none of this proves that Pebbels was a miracle dog, one of a kind. It proves something else — and more important. These abilities are real in dogs and more widespread than most people believe. What was special about her was not that she could do these things. What was special was that I looked closely. And that is exactly the request this whole book makes of you: look just as closely at your own animal. Then you will recognize what I recognized — that there was never “just a dog” there.

The names and studies mentioned are meant as signposts for the interested reader, not as a complete bibliography. Anyone who wants to dig deeper will find, under these researchers and their institutes, a rich trove of freely available work on dog cognition.

Thank You

This book tells of Pebbels and me. But neither she in my life nor these pages would exist without one person: Nicole.

She was the one who brought Pebbels to us back then, against my no and for my happiness. She has a full-time job — and yet all those years she took care of Pebbels as if Pebbels were her full-time job. She slept countless nights in the living room because Pebbels and I snored in duet —

and never once counted up who all was actually lying in her bed. She drove us on that last journey.

And for one thing I'm especially grateful to her: for the pictures. Nicole always took such beautiful photos of Pebbels — otherwise I wouldn't have any today. Almost everything you see of her in this book is seen through Nicole's eyes. Without her, this book would have only words. Because of her, it has Pebbels' face.

Thank you, Nicole. For her. For everything.

And thank you, Bam Bam — loyal accomplice, patient long-suffering one, eternal scout of the gang. You're holding the fort, and you still open the gate just the way she taught you. There's no better way to carry a legacy.

Patric