

For A Bit of Ribbon

by **Albert Payson Terhune** *from Lad: A Dog*

Lad is a collie dog who lives with his Master and Mistress on a farm called "The Place." He is well-loved by the Master and Mistress. In this passage, Master and Mistress have entered Lad in a dog show. They have never been to a show before, and they have no idea what to expect.

Around the ring, at the judge's order, the Novice collies were paraded. Most of them stepped high and fast and carried their heads proudly aloft—the thin choke-collars cutting deep into their furry necks. One entered was a harum-scarum puppy who writhed and bit and whirled about in ecstasy of terror.

Lad moved solemnly along at the Mistress' side. He did not pant or curvet or look showy. He was miserable and every line of his splendid body showed his misery. The Mistress, too, glancing at the more spectacular dogs, wanted to cry—not because she was about to lose, but because Lad was about to lose. Her heart ached for him. Again she blamed herself bitterly for bringing him here.

McGilead, hands in pockets, stood sucking at an empty brier pipe, and scanning the parade that circled around him. Presently he stepped up to the Mistress, checked her as she filed past him, and said to her with a sort of sorrowful kindness:

"Please take your dog over to the far end of the ring. Take him into the corner where he won't be in my way while I am judging."

Yes, he spoke courteously enough, but the Mistress would rather have had him hit her across the face. Meekly she obeyed his command. Across the ring, to the very farthest corner, she went—poor beautiful Lad beside her, disgraced, weeded out of the competition at the very start. There, far out of the contest, she stood, a drooping little figure, feeling as though everyone were sneering at her dear dog's disgrace.

Lad seemed to sense her sorrow. For, as he stood beside her, head and tail low, he whined softly and licked her hand as if in encouragement.

She ran her fingers along his silky head. Then, to keep from crying, she watched the other contestants.

No longer were these parading. One at a time and then in twos, the judge was standing them on the platform. He looked at their teeth. He pressed their heads between his hands. He "hefted" their hips. He ran his fingers through their coats. He pressed his palm upward against their underbodies. He subjected them to a score of such annoyances, but he did it all with a quick and sure touch that not even the crankiest of them could resent.

Then he stepped back and studied the quartet. After that he seemed to remember Lad's presence, and, as though by way of earning his fee, he slouched across the ring to where the forlorn Mistress was petting her dear disgraced dog.

Lazily, perfunctorily, the judge ran his hand over Lad, with absolutely none of the thoroughness that had marked his inspection of the other dogs. Apparently there was no need to look for the finer points in a disqualified collie. The sketchy examination did not last three seconds. At its end the judge jotted down a number on a pad he held. Then he laid one hand heavily on Lad's head and curtly thrust out his other hand at the Mistress.

"Can I take him away now?" she asked, still stroking Lad's fur.

"Yes," rasped the judge, "and take this along with him."

In his outstretched hand fluttered a little bunch of silk—dark blue, with gold lettering on it.

The blue ribbon! First prize in the Novice class! And this grouchy little judge was awarding it— to Lad!

Questions

1. What did the Mistress do to keep from crying?
2. What do you think *aloft* means here: "Most of them stepped high and fast and carried their heads proudly aloft"?
3. Give one quotation from the passage that shows that the Mistress thought Lad was going to lose.
4. When do you think the judge decided that Lad won. Why?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. writhed
2. ecstasy
3. curvet
4. hefted
5. annoyances
6. slouched
7. perfunctorily
8. sketchy

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) “One entered was a harum-scarum puppy who **writhed** and bit and whirled about in ecstasy of terror.”

a. squirmed; twisted b. barked; growled c. cried or howled d. laid down; collapsed

2) “One entered was a harum-scarum puppy who writhed and bit and whirled about in **ecstasy** of terror.”

a. anticipation b. dream; nightmare c. emotional state; frenzy d. imitation; pretending

3) ‘He did not pant or **curvet** or look showy.’”

a. roll over; somersault b. leap on two legs; hop c. bark; yip d. drool; slobber

4) “He “ **hefted**” their hips.”

a. looked closely; examined b. hit or spanked c. lifted or raised d. petted or rubbed

5) “He subjected them to a score of such **annoyances**”

a. tests or trials b. loud sounds; booms c. judges d. discomforts; aggravations

6) “After that he seemed to remember Lad’s presence, and, as though by way of earning his fee, he **slouched** across the ring”

a. moved lazily; strolled b. rushed; ran c. waved or signaled d. called or greeted

7) “Lazily, **perfunctorily**, the judge ran his hand over Lad”

a. gently; easily b. routinely; indifferently c. carefully d. noisily; loudly

8) “The **sketchy** examination did not last three seconds”

a. artistic b. final; last c. important or necessary d. incomplete or brief