

Lucky Bitch

I don't recall whose idea the dog-share was.

Looking back, I guess it was probably mine – it's just the kind of flaky idea I'm usually charmed by. I must have conceived of it as a way to befriend Jen, who had just moved into our rented Victorian. I was also new to the city, and making friends was number three on my to-do list, right after "buy sofa" and "find house-keeper." Jen, blonde and vibrant to my toast-colored and bookish, was the ideal friend for my life in the city. My offers to dog-sit Jen's dog, Frida, really stemmed from my desire to connect with Jen.

Or maybe it was proposed by Jen. To her, my life must have seemed perfect. I'd recently married a wonderful man and found a job in PR. I lived in a rent-controlled apartment at the edge of Golden Gate Park. Suddenly, the magical trinity of great guy, great job and great apartment was mine. I even had a garage. To Jen, I must have seemed a lucky bitch. Maybe she wanted me to scoop up dog poop for a while.

Anyhow, the dog-share idea was a good one. With her multiple graphic design jobs and busy dating life, Jen had to leave the dog alone all day, sometimes late into the night. And I had begun to crave a pet but could not handle the responsibility of being a full-time pet owner.

Initially, I had Frida on Sunday mornings, when Jen worked in Marin. And so my Sundays, which had so long been spent nursing hangovers, now took a wholesome turn. My husband and I had *our* café in the Sunset, where we read the New Yorker while sipping mimosas, a yellow frisbee that we bought from the pet shop in Cole valley, and an animal

that loved us. For a person whose childhood was beset by visitation rights and battling parents, this secure normality was simultaneously wonderful and alarming. I suddenly had furniture from Pottery Barn. Sometimes I felt like I was living a J.Crew ad. And yet I was still in my '20s, and my heady days as a Eng.lit major were still etched in my mind. Surely this work-life balance was not going to be my permanent concern. Surely my *real* life— the one involving late nights and edgy poetry—wasn't yet over. Surely, I was still a lot like Jen.

Jen's *Sex and the City*-esque lifestyle, revealed to me while exchanging notes on the dog's routine, had all the elements of my imagined one: the commitment to an artistic career, the exciting first dates, the urban juggle of time vs. meaningful activity. Yet, despite my initial eagerness, she and I had failed to warm to each other. Then one evening, walking past her apartment after an exhausting day at work, I heard the unmistakable sounds of a cocktail party in progress. I imagined Jen in a black dress, holding a champagne flute while talking animatedly about theater and politics. Envy and wistfulness flickered through me. Jen had the life I craved. To top it all, she even had Frida.

For Frida was fantastic. Each time she saw me, she launched a celebration of delighted love that was terribly unsuave. I adored her. Sensing my attachment, Jen encouraged regular dog-sitting sessions, an invitation I took seriously. Soon, I was borrowing Frida every day. Because Jen had way too much to do without having to worry about the dog, especially when she had me to help out. Right?

I guess Jen felt differently.

This became apparent when I let myself in to Jen's apartment to collect Frida one day and found Jen already there, cozied up with Frida on the couch in a way that made me

bristle. Jen informed me that she wanted a new dog-share schedule, one in which I saw Frida only on weekends. "That doesn't make sense," I said, trying to remain calm, "Aren't you the busiest on weekdays?" "My work schedule is calming down," Jen said, not meeting my eyes. "And I feel like I never see Frida anymore." After an argument that was right out of Kramer vs. Kramer, we drew up a fairer plan. Finally Jen smiled. "I appreciate all you do," she said to me, "But she IS mine." This was incontestable. But then I noticed that the dog had disappeared. Rattled by our argument, Frida had run away and hidden under the bed.

After this, things calmed down for a while. Once, I even invited Jen to come along with Frida and me when we went for a walk. We had little to say to each other. But still, when it grew dark and we turned home, I noticed that the dog walked closer to me and secretly celebrated.

Then Jen's father was diagnosed with cancer. "I'll probably fly out to see him," she said unhappily, while collecting Frida from my apartment. "Will you keep Frida? I won't be gone for long." I was happy to.

Jen thanked me and got to her feet. Frida remained at mine, wagging her tail.

"Come on, Frida," Jen said, "Home!"

But the dog refused to get up. Instead she scooted imperceptibly closer to me. For a moment the room was silent – I, sitting frozen in my chair, Jen looking down at Frida, and Frida communicating her preference. Eventually, Jen persuaded the dog to leave and I interpreted the grief on her face as apprehension over her father's health. But when she left town to go see her dad, she did not leave Frida with me.

That was the beginning of the end of the dog-share. I ran into Jen and Frida on the

the sidewalk one night, returning from a walk, and though Frida strained to come to me, Jen held on tight. The locks on Jen's front door changed. In a few months, both the dog and the girl had moved. I didn't get a chance to say good-bye.

I've not gotten a dog of my own. My lifestyle is too busy to guiltlessly include a creature as sensitive and loving as Frida. Yet, even now, walking through the park on Sunday mornings, I look around for Jen and Frida, hoping that someday we'll run into each other, and we'll all have another chance.

###