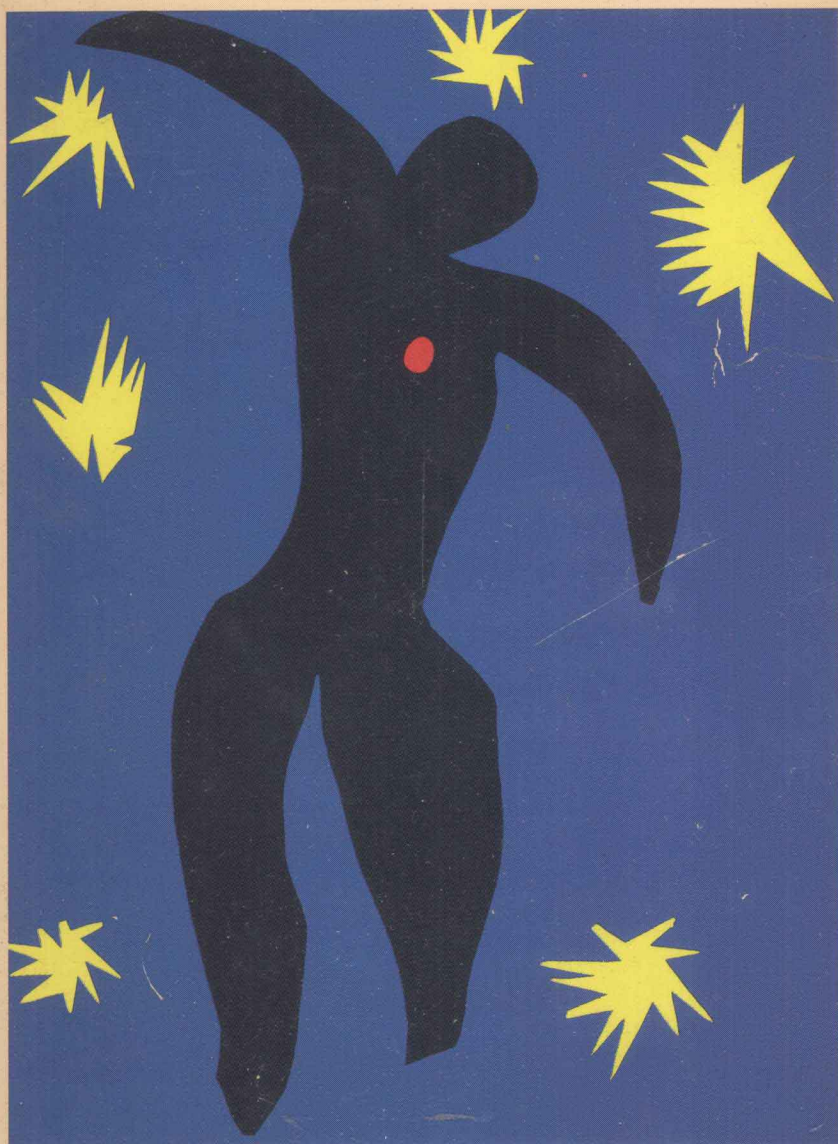


SCHOLASTIC
LITERATURE ANTHOLOGIES

VALUES



PUBLISHED BY SCHOLASTIC, INC.

SCHOLASTIC
LITERATURE ANTHOLOGIES

**A Collection of Prose and Poetry
on the Theme of**

VALUES

Edited by
Michael Spring
Editor, Literary Cavalcade



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Assistant Director, Division of
Education Studies
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ISBN 0-590-34585-0

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12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4

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CONTENTS

SHORT STORIES

<i>James Herriot: Night of the Hunt Ball</i>	7
<i>Kurt Vonnegut: The Lie</i>	19
<i>John Steinbeck: Junius Maltby</i>	75
<i>Herman Melville: What Redburn Saw</i>	99
<i>Hernando Téllez: Just Lather, That's All</i>	109
<i>Russell G. Davis and Brent K. Ashabranner:</i>	
<i>The Gift and the Giver</i>	129
<i>Art Buchwald: Scholastis Adolescum</i>	135
<i>I. B. Singer: The Washwoman</i>	139

ESSAYS

<i>Lewis Thomas: The Lie Detector</i>	35
<i>Carl Sagan:</i>	
<i>Twelve Things I Wish They Taught at School</i>	41
<i>Bob Greene:</i>	
<i>The Country's Going Through a Rough Spell</i>	49
<i>Andy Rooney: Quality</i>	53
<i>Marya Mannes: Wasteland</i>	59

<i>Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Drum Major for Justice</i>	62
<i>Robert Coles: The Old Ones of New Mexico</i>	67
<i>Hugh Prather: Notes to Myself: Values</i>	120
<i>John Coleman: The Trashman</i>	125
<i>Mahatma Gandhi: Faith on Trial</i>	145
<i>Studs Terkel: American Dreams — Lost and Found</i>	151
<i>Donna Woolfolt Cross: Being Somebody</i>	161

POETRY

<i>Shel Silverstein: How Many, How Much</i>	16
<i>Mari Evans: The Silver Cell</i>	17
<i>Sara Teasdale: Barter</i>	39
<i>N. Scott Momaday: The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee</i>	47
<i>Henry David Thoreau: Trees</i>	57
<i>Marge Piercy: To Be of Use</i>	64
<i>Sara Booth: Ariel</i>	73
<i>Walt Whitman: When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer</i> ...	97
<i>Langston Hughes: Peace</i>	107
<i>Wendell Berry: To a Siberian Woodsman</i>	115
<i>Gabriel Okara: Once Upon a Time</i>	122

DRAMA

<i>Paddy Chayefsky: Printer's Measure</i>	165
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"Yes, he's a pleasant little thing, isn't he?"

James Herriot

NIGHT OF THE HUNT BALL

● James Herriot's stories of his life as a veterinarian in rural England, in books such as All Things Bright and Beautiful and All Creatures Great and Small, have won him fans worldwide. A compassionate man, he rarely viewed his work as "just a job" but became personally involved with all his patients. He could not always follow his emotions, however, when they conflicted with his professional duties as a doctor.

IT WAS WHEN MY BOSS SIEGFRIED AND I WERE MAKING one of our market day trips to Darrowby, that we noticed the little dog. He was sitting up begging in front of the biscuit stall. "Look at that little chap," Siegfried said. "I wonder where he's sprung from."

As he spoke, the stallholder threw a biscuit which the dog devoured eagerly. But when the man came round and stretched out a hand, the little animal trotted away.

He stopped, however, at another stall which sold eggs, cheese, butter, and cakes. Without hesitation he sat up again in the begging position, rock-steady, paws dangling, head pointed expectantly.

I nudged Siegfried. "There he goes again."

My colleague nodded. "Yes, he's a pleasant little thing, isn't he? What breed would you call him?"

"A cross, I'd say. He's like a little brown sheepdog, but there's a touch of something else — maybe terrier."

It wasn't long before he was munching a bun. This time we walked over to him. As we drew near I spoke gently.

NIGHT OF THE HUNT BALL

“Here, boy,” I said, squatting down a yard away. “Come on, let’s have a look at you.”

He faced me and, for a moment, two friendly brown eyes gazed at me from an attractive little face. The fringed tail waved in response to my words, but as I inched nearer he turned and ambled unhurriedly among the market crowd till he was lost to sight.

I was standing there when a young policeman came up to me.

“I’ve been watching that little dog begging among the stalls all morning,” he said. “But like you, I haven’t been able to get near him.”

“Yes, it’s strange. He’s obviously friendly, yet he’s afraid. I wonder who owns him.”

“I reckon he’s a stray, Mr. Herriot. I’m interested in dogs myself and I think I know just about all of them around here. But this one’s a stranger to me.”

I nodded. “I bet you’re right. So anything could have happened to him. He could have been ill-treated by somebody and run away, or he could have been dumped from a car.”

“Yes,” he replied. “There are some lovely people around! It beats me how anybody can leave a helpless animal to fend for itself like that. I’ve had a few tries at catching him myself, but it’s no good.”

The memory stayed with me for the rest of the day. Even when I lay in bed that night, I was unable to drive away the disturbing image of the little brown creature wandering in a strange world, sitting up asking for help in the only way he knew.

On the Friday night of the same week, Siegfried and I were putting on our evening clothes for the Hunt Ball at East Hirdsley, about ten miles away.

It was a long, drawn-out business because those were the days of starched shirt fronts and stiff high collars. I was in an even worse plight because I had outgrown my suit. Even when I had managed to button the strangling collar, I had to fight my way into the dinner jacket which nipped me cruelly under the arms. I had just managed to put on the complete outfit and was trying out a few careful breaths, when the phone rang.

It was the same young policeman I had been speaking to earlier in the week. “We’ve got that dog around here, Mr. Herriot. You know — the one that was begging in the marketplace.”

“Oh, yes? Somebody’s managed to catch him, then?”

NIGHT OF THE HUNT BALL

There was a pause. "No, not really. One of our men found him lying by the roadside about a mile out of town and brought him in. He's been in an accident."

I told Siegfried. He looked at his watch. "Always happens, doesn't it, James. Just when we're ready to go out. It's nine o'clock now and we should be on our way." He thought for a moment. "Anyway, slip round there and have a look and I'll wait for you. It would be better if we could go to this affair together."

As I drove to the police station, I hoped fervently that there wouldn't be much to do. This Hunt Ball meant a lot to my boss. He would have a wonderful time just chatting and drinking with so many fellow horse lovers, even though he hardly danced at all. Also, he maintained, it was good for his business as a veterinary surgeon to meet his clients socially.

The kennels were at the bottom of a yard behind the Station. The policeman led me down and opened one of the doors. The little dog was lying very still under a single light bulb. When I bent and stroked the brown coat, his tail stirred briefly among the straw of his bed.

"He can still manage a wag anyway," I said.

The policeman nodded. "Aye, there's no doubt he's a good-natured little thing."

I tried to examine him as much as possible without touching. I didn't want to hurt him, and there was no saying what the extent of his injuries might be. But even at a glance, certain things were obvious. He had multiple wounds, one hind leg was fractured, and there was blood on his lips.

This could be from damaged teeth, and I gently raised the head with a view to looking into his mouth. He was lying on his right side. As the head came around it was as though somebody had struck me in the face.

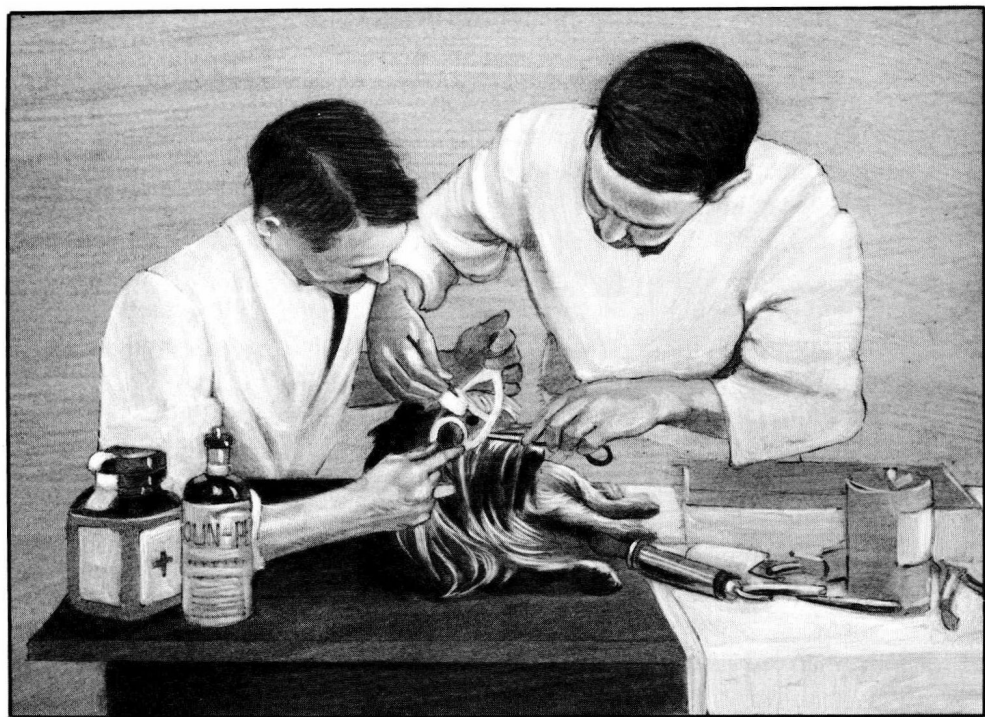
The right eye had been violently dislodged from its socket.

I seemed to squat there for a long time, stunned by the obscenity. As the seconds dragged by, I looked into the little dog's face and he looked back at me — trustingly, from one soft brown eye.

The policeman's voice broke my thoughts. "He's a mess, isn't he?"

"Yes . . . yes . . . must have been struck by some vehicle — maybe dragged along by the look of all those wounds."

"What d'you think, Mr. Herriot?"



“Oh, forget the Hunt Ball. Let’s get busy.”

I knew what he meant. It was the sensible thing to ease this lost, unwanted creature from the world. He was grievously hurt, and he didn’t seem to belong to anybody. A quick overdose of anesthetic — his troubles would be over and I’d be on my way to the dance.

But the policeman didn’t say anything of the sort. Maybe, like me, he was looking into the soft depths of that one trusting eye.

I stood up quickly. “Can I use your phone?”

At the other end of the line Siegfried’s voice crackled with impatience. “It’s half-past nine, James! If we’re going to this thing we’ve got to go now or we might as well not bother. A stray dog, badly injured. It doesn’t sound like such a great problem.”

“I know, Siegfried. I’m sorry to hold you up, but I can’t make up my mind. I wish you’d come round and tell me what you think.”

There was a silence, then a long sigh. “All right, James. See you in five minutes.”

He created a slight stir as he entered the Station. Even in his casual working clothes; Siegfried always managed to look distinguished. But as he swept into the Station newly bathed and shaved, a camel coat thrown over the sparkling white shirt and black tie, there was something regal ¹ about him.

NIGHT OF THE HUNT BALL

He drew respectful glances from the men sitting around, then my young policeman stepped forward.

"This way, sir," he said, and we went back to the kennels.

Siegfried was silent as he crouched over the dog, looking him over, as I had done, without touching him. Then he carefully raised the head and the monstrous eye glared.

"Good Heavens!" he said softly, and at the sound of his voice the long fringed tail moved along the ground.

For a few seconds Siegfried stayed very still, looking fixedly at the dog's face. In the silence, the whisking tail rustled the straw.

Then he straightened up. "Let's get him round there," he murmured.

In the surgery we anesthetized the little animal. As he lay unconscious on the table we were able to examine him thoroughly. After a few minutes Siegfried stuffed his stethoscope into the pocket of his white coat and leaned both hands on the table.

"Luxated eyeball, fractured thigh bone, umpteen deep wounds, broken claws. There's enough here to keep us going till midnight, James."

I didn't say anything.

My boss pulled the knot from his black tie. He peeled off the stiff collar and hung it on the cross bar of the surgery lamp.

"That's better," he muttered, and began laying out materials to stitch up the wounds.

I looked at him across the table. "How about the Hunt Ball?"

"Oh, forget the Hunt Ball," Siegfried said. "Let's get busy."

We were busy, too, for a long time. I hung up my collar next to my colleague's and we began on the eye. I knew we both felt the same — we wanted to get rid of that horror before we did anything else.

I lubricated the great ball and pulled the eyelids apart while Siegfried gently maneuvered it back into the orbital cavity. I sighed as everything slid out of sight, leaving only the cornea² visible.

Siegfried chuckled with satisfaction. "Looks like an eye again, doesn't it?" He seized the ophthalmoscope and peered into the depths.

"And there's no major damage — could be as good as new again. But we'll just stitch the lids together to protect it for a few days."

The broken ends of the fractured leg were badly displaced and we had to struggle to bring them into position before applying the

NIGHT OF THE HUNT BALL

plaster of paris. But at last we finished and started on the long job of stitching the many cuts and wounds.

We worked separately for this, and for a long time it was quiet in the operating room except for the snip of scissors as we clipped the brown hair away from the wounds. I knew and Siegfried knew that we were almost certainly working without payment, but the most disturbing thought was that after all our efforts we might still have to put him asleep. He was still in the care of the police and if nobody claimed him within ten days it meant euthanasia.³ And if his late owners were really interested in his fate, why hadn't they tried to contact the police before now?

By the time we had completed our work and washed the instruments it was after midnight. Siegfried dropped the last needle into its tray and looked at the sleeping animal.

"I think he's beginning to come round," he said. "Let's take him through to the fire and we can have a drink while he recovers."

We stretched the dog through to the sitting-room on a blanket and laid him on the rug before the brightly burning coals. With our starched white shirts and braided evening trousers to remind us of the lost dance, we lay back in our chairs on either side of the fireplace. Between us our patient stretched peacefully.

He was a happier sight now. One eye was closed by the protecting stitches and his hind leg projected stiffly in its white cast, but he was tidy, cleaned up, cared for. He looked as though he belonged to somebody — but then there was a great big doubt about that.

It was nearly one o'clock in the morning when the shaggy brown head began to move.

Siegfried leaned forward and touched one of his ears. Immediately the tail flapped against the rug and a pink tongue lazily licked his fingers.

"What an absolutely grand little dog," he murmured, but his voice had a distant quality. I knew he was worried, too.

I took the stitches out of the eyelids in two days and was delighted to find a normal eye underneath.

The young policeman was as pleased as I was. "Look at that!" he exclaimed. "You'd never know anything had happened there."

"Yes, it's done wonderfully well. All the swelling and inflammation has gone." I hesitated for a moment. "Has anybody inquired about him?"



“Looks as though he’s been a success.”

He shook his head. “Nothing yet. But there’s another eight days to go and we’re taking good care of him here.”

I visited the Police Station several times and the little animal greeted me with undisguised joy. All his fear was gone. He stood upright against my legs on his plastered limb, his tail swishing.

But all the time my sense of foreboding⁴ increased, and on the tenth day I made my way almost with dread to the police kennels. I had heard nothing. My course of action seemed inevitable. Putting old or hopelessly ill dogs to sleep was often an act of mercy, but when it was a young healthy dog it was terrible. I hated it, but it was one of the things veterinary surgeons had to do.

The young policeman was standing in the doorway.

“Still no news?” I asked, and he shook his head.

I went past him into the kennel. The shaggy little creature stood up against my legs as before, laughing into my face, mouth open, eyes shining.

I turned away quickly. I’d have to do this right now or I’d never do it.

“Mr. Herriot.” The policeman put his hand on my arm. “I think I’ll take him.”

NIGHT OF THE HUNT BALL

"You?" I stared at him.

"Aye, that's right. We get a lot o' stray dogs in here and though I feel sorry for them you can't give them all a home, can you?"

"No, you can't," I said. "I have the same problem."

He nodded slowly. "But somehow this one's different, and it seems to me he's just come at the right time. I have two little girls and they've been at me for a bit to get 'em a dog. This little bloke looks just right for the job."

Warm relief began to ebb through me. "I couldn't agree more. He's the soul of good nature. I bet he'll be wonderful with children."

"Good. That's settled then. I thought I'd ask your advice first." He smiled happily.

I looked at him as though I had never seen him before. "What's your name?"

"Phelps," he replied. "P.C. Phelps."

He was a good-looking young fellow, clean-skinned, with cheerful blue eyes and a solid, dependable look about him. I had to fight against an impulse to shake his hand and thump him on the back. But I managed to preserve the professional exterior.

"Well, that's fine." I bent and stroked the little dog. "Don't forget to bring him along to the surgery in ten days for removal of the stitches, and we'll have to get that plaster off in about a month."

It was Siegfried who took out the stitches, and I didn't see our patient again until four weeks later.

P.C. Phelps had his little girls, aged four and six, with him, as well as the dog.

"You said the plaster ought to come off about now," he said, and I nodded.

He looked down at the children. "Well. come on, you two, lift him on the table."

Eagerly the little girls put their arms around their new pet, and as they hoisted him the tail wagged furiously and the wide mouth panted in delight.

"Looks as though he's been a success," I said.

He smiled. "That's an understatement. He's perfect with those two. I can't tell you what pleasure he's given us. He's one of the family."

I got out my little saw and began to hack at the plaster.

NIGHT OF THE HUNT BALL

“It’s worked both ways, I should say. A dog loves a secure home.”

“Well, he couldn’t be more secure.” He ran his hand along the brown coat and laughed as he addressed the little dog. “That’s what you get for begging among the stalls on market day, my lad. You’re in the hands of the law now.”

¹ **regal:** royal

² **cornea:** the transparent part of the outer coat of the eyeball

³ **euthanasia:** mercy killing

⁴ **foreboding:** feeling that something bad is about to happen

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why does Herriot miss the Hunt Ball? How does he feel about this? How does his boss, Siegfried, feel about it?

2. What qualities in the dog appeal to Herriot? What does this tell you about his own set of values?

3. Would you call Herriot a sentimental man? Support your opinion with evidence from the story.

● Like an old folk song, this poem asks a series of riddles, then gives its own answers. Look for what all the answers have in common — Silverstein has a definite statement to make.

Shel Silverstein

HOW MANY, HOW MUCH

How many slams in an old screen door?

Depends how loud you shut it.

How many slices in a bread?

Depends how thin you cut it.

How much good inside a day?

Depends how good you live 'em.

How much love inside a friend?

Depends how much you give 'em.