

BOOK SIX CHAPTER 12 MISS MARCH

Ellen March was born in a small town in New Jersey. On a beautiful autumn day, walking home from first grade, she noticed that cars going in both directions had slowed to a stop. People standing on the sidewalk were watching a small dog in the street. “Aren’t you going to help him?” Everyone’s answer was the same. “No, he’s not mine.” Ellen was angry. “He doesn’t need to be yours for you to help him!” Walking cautiously into the street, she picked up the frightened dog holding him close as she made her way home. The small brown and white puppy wouldn’t leave Ellen’s side, nestling next to her at bedtime. The day after Ellen’s mother phoned the local newspaper, the dog’s family arrived to take him home. Her lifelong love of animals began the day she first met Blossom.

Ellen’s brother was eight months old. Her mother asked “Will you watch Paul while I’m in the kitchen?” When she returned to see Ellen sitting inside the crib, legs crossed, staring at the baby, she laughed, asking “What are you doing?” “What you told me to do. I’m watching him.” Ellen was a literal thinker.

She looked forward to spending Saturday at her friend Bonnie’s house. When she arrived, Bonnie’s father was sitting on the couch, petting the dog in his lap. A few hours later, when the collie (who they’d been playing with outside) jumped onto the living room couch, the screaming started - “Get down! Get off the couch! Get down!” Ellen didn’t understand. Why was it all right for the dog to be on the couch a few hours ago, but now he was being yelled at?

Ellen’s teachers often didn’t succeed in engaging her. Always attentive and asking questions, respectful, polite, self disciplined, organized and meticulous about details, she wasn’t intimidated by anyone or any subject. Her daily after school visits to the library ensured she’d never stop learning about the endless things that interested her. Logic and intuition were always given equal attention.

As a teenager, she discovered how much she enjoyed caricature and satire. One of her favorite artists was Thomas Nast, responsible for exposing the graft and corruption of Tammany Hall, creating both the symbols of the American political parties, (donkey and elephant), and the western image of Santa Claus. When her high school teacher asked the class “What is your favorite quotation?” Ellen was the first to answer. “Character is fate - Heraclitus.”

At twenty one she began her first job as the secretary of a successful business man who lived in Princeton, with offices on Park Avenue in New York City. It would be her only job, lasting for the next forty years. Reliable, dependable, trustworthy and loved, she was now part of a ever growing family.

Ticonderoga Number 2 was the only brand she would use. Always writing in pencil, sharpened Ticonderogas were always at the ready on her desk at home, at the office, even in her handbag.

When one of her employer's grandchildren (seven years old) arrived to visit her grandfather, knowing his appointments were running late, Miss March stepped in. Ellen March talked to young people as she would to any adult - "I think it's time you met a friend of mine."

Taking a taxicab to the St. Regis Hotel, the two walked to the front desk. "May I please speak with the manager." When he arrived, Miss March, with a wink, began. "I understand you're opening a new room later today. Gesturing to the young girl at her side "I'd like to introduce you to Princess Katherine who's in New York only for a few hours; she'd like to see King Cole. We understand only men are allowed but were hoping you might make an exception for her Majesty." Returning Miss March's wink, "Of course, please follow me." The wood paneled room with a curved bar was overshadowed by the larger than life Maxfield Parrish mural of Old King Cole. The seven year old was transfixed.

Grand Central Station was next, the ceiling zodiac mural of the Mediterranean sky, twenty five hundred stars in gold leaf and cerulean blue. Miss March - "The constellations are north when they should be south." "Does it matter?" "No, it's not a map; with something so beautiful, it doesn't matter." Two golden moments. Thanks to Miss March, many more were to come.

When she retired, the luxury of sleeping late became a habit. Never having married, she was the personification of the expression "comfortable in your own skin." She was not one for useless extravagances. At seventy, with a wonderful sense of humor, she was content and in perfect health, her only exercise a daily afternoon walk.

Her parents had left her the house she'd grown up in, now home to three dogs, two cats, and a rabbit. It fit her needs perfectly. Years before, when first meeting Blossom, she'd made him a promise. Knowing well that some might disagree, in her mind, a promise made to a puppy was no different than any other promise. She would devote the rest of her life to animals.

Ellen wondered why some people bonded easily with animals, others not. Thinking about physicians conducting experiments to solve issues of human illness, she asked herself why do we experiment on animals to find out about ourselves? Alexander Pope came to mind. "The proper study of mankind is man."

How did thousands of birds flying together in a mass never interfere or harm one another, the same for swimming fish? Why were whales now, as never before, communicating with new frequencies? Could they be doing this to help reverse the poisons in their water? Ellen wasn't surprised to find that animals who are given names are happier, named cows giving more milk

When she read about the trial in the Hague, she'd written the five defendants, offering to help in any way she could. "If you should ever find yourself in New Jersey or New York, please get in touch. I would very much like to meet you." She never received a reply.

It wasn't until two years later, returning to college in Massachusetts, his parents missing, that Julian Emerson remembered the letter. He contacted Miss March. Her grant application was five sentences. "It would be my privilege to devote the rest of my life working on establishing an interspecies internet. The positive results would be difficult, if not impossible, to exaggerate. It's time to update the French saying *Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait* - If youth but knew and the old but could. *Youth does know! The old can!* Sincerely, Ellen March."

