

Lie Down with Dogs

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A Parable of Corruption, Consequence, and the Courage to Rise

"He that lieth down with dogs shall rise up with fleas." — Ancient Wisdom

There was once a village — small, young, and full of promise — nestled at the edge of fertile land and quiet waters. Its people had come seeking something rare: a place where their voices could still shape their destiny, where the land they loved would remain their own, and where the future would be built not by distant powers but by the hands of neighbors.

But every village, no matter how pure its beginnings, faces a moment of choosing. And in this village, that moment arrived cloaked in the language of progress.

A council was formed — not in the open square where all could see, but behind closed doors. It called itself a circle of wise men and women, gathered to guide the village toward prosperity. Its members spoke of growth, of opportunity, of a future bright with industry and promise. And the village, weary of struggle and hungry for hope, listened.

What the village did not see — what it chose not to see — was that many of those who sat in that closed circle also held the keys to the village's own gates. They were the ones who would decide what could be built, where, and how. They were the ones who would weigh the public good against private gain. And in the shadows, those two scales began to tilt.

The village lay down with dogs.

The Choice

The proverb is older than memory: lie down with dogs, and you will rise with fleas. It is not a threat. It is a law — as certain as the turning of seasons, as merciless as the tide. The fleas do not come as punishment; they come as consequence. They are the price of proximity to that which is unclean.

In the village, the dogs were many, and they wore many faces. There were those who spoke for the people by day and shaped deals for themselves by night. There were those who guarded the gates while opening them for friends. There were those who whispered in the ear of power, who traded influence like coin, who smiled at the public table while their hands moved beneath it.

And there was the one who sat at the center — the gatekeeper — who decided what the village would see and what it would not. The gatekeeper's shadow grew long, and in that shadow, the dogs moved freely.

The village could have chosen otherwise. It could have demanded that the circle meet in the light, that its words be written for all to read, that its members choose between public trust and private interest. It could have said: we will not lie down with dogs.

But it did not.

And so the village lay down.

The Fleas

The fleas came, as they always do.

They came first as a feeling — a sense that something had shifted, that the village was no longer entirely its own. Decisions seemed to arrive already made, wrapped in the language of inevitability. Meetings that should have been open felt rehearsed. Questions that should have been asked were quietly set aside.

Then the fleas came as fact. The land that had fed families for generations was carved into shapes that served no one but the dogs and their masters. The water that sustained the village — the ancient aquifer beneath the soil — was promised to those who would drain it dry. The quiet roads where children once played became corridors of dust and noise and light that never slept.

But the deepest fleas were not in the land or the water. They were in the heart of the village itself. Trust, once broken, does not mend easily. The people began to look at one another with new eyes — wondering who had known, who had agreed, who had stayed silent. The public square, once a place of open speech, became a place of whispers and glances. The village had gained what the dogs had promised — growth, investment, the attention of power — but it had lost something it could not name, something it would not soon recover.

This is the nature of fleas. They do not merely bite. They burrow. They remain.

The Stoic's Wisdom

There lived among the ancients a man named Epictetus, who taught that it is not things that disturb us, but our judgments about things. The village could not undo what had been done. The land was carved. The water was promised. The circle still met in shadow. These were facts — as unchangeable as the turning of the earth.

But the judgment — that was the village's to make.

The Stoic does not rage against the dogs. The dogs are what they are, and they will do what dogs do. Nor does the Stoic pretend the fleas do not exist. To deny the consequence is to compound the error. The Stoic looks at the fleas, accepts them as the price of the choice that was made, and then asks: what now?

What can be changed? The circle can be brought into the light. The gatekeeper can be made to answer. The dogs can be named, and the village can choose — this time with eyes open — whether to lie down again. The people can teach their children that public trust is not a coin to be traded, that power without transparency is theft, that the price of lying down with dogs is always paid in fleas.

What cannot be changed is the past. The fleas are here. But the Stoic does not curse them. He carries them with dignity, learns from them, and resolves never to lie down with dogs again.

The Memory

There is a danger in acceptance that the Stoic must name: the danger of forgetting. To forget the injustice is to invite its return. The fleas themselves will not let the village forget — every time the people walk the changed land, every time they taste the altered water, every time they see the dogs return for more — the memory will stir. But memory alone is not enough. The Stoic remembers in order to act.

So the village remembers. Not with rage, but with clarity. Not to punish, but to prevent. The memory becomes a shield, a warning, a vow: we will not lie down with dogs again.

The Rising

The village was still young. Its story was not finished. The fleas it carried were heavy, but they were not fatal. They were a reminder — harsh, unyielding, and true — of what happens when a people allow public power and private gain to intertwine without the safeguard of open eyes and honest speech.

The path forward was not to pretend the fleas did not exist. It was to carry them with dignity, to learn from them, and to ensure that the next generation would not have to carry the same burden. It was to build a village where the circle met in the square, where the gatekeeper answered to the people, where the dogs were kept at a distance and the fleas were never again invited in.

The Stoic does not ask for a world without fleas. He asks only for the wisdom to recognize the dogs before he lies down with them, and the courage to rise up — fleas and all — and move forward anyway.

The village had lain down with dogs. The fleas were theirs. Now they would rise.

And in the rising, they would become something new — not the village they had been, nor the village the dogs had tried to make them, but a village that had looked into the darkness, accepted its cost, and chosen the light.

— A Parable for Our Time
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