

# THE WORLD IS A SNIFF

MINDY HARDWICK





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PRINT ISBN: 979-8-218-04670-5

September 2022

This story was first published as a Kindle Vella, July 2021-May 2022

Copy Editor: Becca Hardwick  
Cover Artist: Su Kopil, Earthly Charms  
Book Format and Layout: Eagle Bay Press

Eagle Bay Press  
P.O. Box 1391  
Cannon Beach, Oregon. 97110

*The World is a Sniff*

*As Told to Mindy Hardwick by Stormy*



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## MY NAME



**T**he first thing everyone asks my Human is, “What type of dog is he?”

My Human explains I am a Cocker Spaniel. Sometimes I have shaggy fur, which hangs in my eyes, and sometimes I have short fur my Human calls a seal coat. I once wore the Cocker skirt, which is long fur along the sides and a short cut on top, but after a bad groom where the groomer cut off some of the fur skirt but not all of it, that was the end of my Cocker skirt. Bad grooms are something I have a lot of, but that’s a story for another day.

The second question quickly follows the first. “Is he purebred?”

I guess everyone thinks because I am both black and tan and on the big size of an American Cocker Spaniel, I must not be purebred.

I am very purebred.

I come from a long lineage of winning agility dogs and my father was a show dog. My mom is a black Cocker with a

white chest. I have the same markings as her on my chest. My uncle is a chocolate Cocker, which explains where I get my tan paws and bushy tan eyebrows. I have six brothers and sisters in my litter and it was the biggest litter my mom ever had. The litter before me only had one pup. That pup stayed at the Breeder Human's home with my mom, grandma, and uncle. She thinks she is a very special pup because there was only one of her and she is a year older than all of us.

But we know that our litter is the most special. We were born for magnificence.

Every day we eat specially cooked food. The Breeder Human holds each of us for a long time so we know we are loved. She places us in a laundry basket and potty trains us outside. People come to visit us all the time. The Humans take lots of pictures of us. They lift us and move our legs back and forth.

In the afternoons, we roll and tumble in a large pen filled with blankets and soft toys. The pen sits outside on a deck, and we get used to outside noises and smells. Our uncle, mother, and grandmother practice weaving between wobbling poles, balancing on teetering seesaws, and racing through canvas tunnels. We peer through the wire crates and dream of our days ahead filled with magnificence.

I am the first dog to climb out of the sleeping box. I waddle down the long hall and stare at the pictures of my uncle, mama, and grandma. There are also pictures of other dogs I don't know. All of the pictures have a lot of blue ribbons attached to the frames. This is what magnificence looks like. Sometimes the other dogs get into a big van and leave for a few days with the Humans. When they return,

there are more ribbons on the wall. The dogs get fed special meals that smell delicious and my tummy growls with anticipation for when I will get those special meals.

One day, we are given a test. This is the beginning of magnificence. But it's been a bad morning for me. I got up on the wrong side of the pen. I snarled a couple of times at the other pups who got too close to my space. I hid the ball behind the Tester Human and peed on the floor. Magnificence slips out of my paws.

After the test, we are loaded back into a crate. We tumble over each other. The Humans talk about us. They look at the videos and they decide our fate. I separate myself from my littermates and press my nose against the crate and listen.

"The black and tan pup. He's a little aggressive. He might not be so suited to the agility life. He should be a pet dog."

"Pet dog?" I ask my littermates. I am going to be a pet dog? My heart quivers and I shake. I shake and shake and shake. What is a pet dog? How can I be a pet dog and still be magnificent?

I ask all the dogs in my family. But no one understands the job of a pet dog. Everyone has always been an agility dog. I tuck my stubby tail between my legs and curl into the corner of the pen. The other dogs roll and tumble and play. But I don't want to play. I am scared. I will not have ribbons by my picture in a hallway. I will not see my other littermates or family dogs at agility events. I will be off on my own as a pet dog. It is a fate worse than death. I can't stop shaking.

For the next couple of days, I pee outside. I eat as much as I can to fill my belly and follow all the Breeder Human's

rules. The Breeder Human gives all of us our first puppy haircut. Everyone says I look the finest of all the dogs. My black and tan markings are striking. Maybe now someone will see how magnificent I am!

The next morning, two of my littermates are taken away and reappear in the yard next door. We all sniff each other through the fence. In their new yard, there are lots of poles and tunnels to teach them how to be magnificent!

That afternoon, someone arrives for my sister. The Human picks her up and holds her close. She coos at her and tells her she will be a magnificent agility dog. I sit very still. One by one my littermates leave for their magnificent lives. No one comes for me.

Maybe a pet dog means no one wanted me at all! I whimper.

But before I can go into a howl, a Human walks toward the pen. Her eyes glow and she smiles. I sniff. She smells like food and comfort and love. Lots of love.

My Human picks me up and holds me close to her chest. I remember her smell from when the Humans came to visit us. The day she visited, she liked my sister, but I knew my sister was already spoken for. That day, I snuggled deep into the Human's palm and tried to tell her I loved her. It must have worked because here she is—lifting me out and hugging me close!

My Human talks to my Breeder Human and takes a bag full of goodies for me. She carries me outside and places me in the back seat of a car. I have never been in a car before and it smells like adventure and excitement. There is a mid-sized Human in the back seat. My Human explains this is

someone she is mentoring. I don't know what mentoring means, but I think it sounds like something nice. My Human must be a nice person to have this extra Human with her.

Suddenly, the car moves and speeds up. Everything spins around me. My stomach lurches and my breakfast lands all over the seat.

I shake and shake. I am sure I will never stop shaking. Someone let me out of this car. Whimpers and howls come out of me and I barely know it's me.

The Human stops the car and turns to look at me. "It's okay. First car rides make all dogs throw up."

I lay my head on the seat and close my eyes.

The small Human rubs my fur. I am really glad she is riding with me. Everything swirls and dances around me. I stop whimpering and howling but I can't stop shaking. I hope the car ride is over soon and I don't have to take very many of these in my new life.

It seems to take a long time, but eventually, the car stops. My Human lifts me out of the back seat. She carries me to a front porch and opens a door. An animal with a long tail and ears steps outside. Her tail swishes as she arches her back. She rubs against my Human.

Who is this strange fascinating animal? I try to sniff her. But she moves away, and I can't get close.

"This is Cleo, the cat," my Human says. "She lives here too."

The cat has the same colors as mine—black, tan, and white—but they look different on her. Tan, black and white fur swirls all over her body. The Human calls her calico. Cleo

smells fun but she is very standoffish. Every time I try to get close to her to sniff her, she dances away like it's a game. I lean down on my front paws and growl and bark at her. I want to be best buddies and hope we sleep on top of each other in the same pen.

"Has the Human given you a name?" Cleo purrs.

"No." I paw the ground. I don't want to tell Cleo I have a name. The Breeder Human gave me a name. She said I had a little bit of an attitude. It wasn't my fault I snapped sometimes at the other pups in my litter. I just liked my space and they got too close and I had to tell them.

"Do you know what a pet dog is?" I ask Cleo.

Cleo winds among the porch posts. She still won't come near me. "No," she purrs. "But it doesn't sound good. I am not a pet cat. I am a cat."

I sit down and lay my head between my paws. I'm supposed to be magnificent but how can I be magnificent as a pet dog? I don't even know what a pet dog is supposed to do!

Cleo hops off the porch and rolls around in the grass. I want to join her and lunge toward her, but my Human captures me before I can leap off the porch.

"Stormy!" My Human says in a bright and cheery voice.

Stormy? I cock my head. What is a stormy?

The Human pets me. "I had another Cocker Spaniel. On the day she died, there was a big storm. On the way home from the veterinarian a rainbow came out. Your name will be the link between my two dogs."

The Human's voice is sad. I know what happens at those final veterinarian appointments. All dogs know those final

vet appointments are where we say our forever goodbyes to our Humans. I lean against my Human. I don't want to say goodbye to her for a long, long time.

“Stormy.” She rubs behind my ears. I press against her fingers.

Stormy.

I have a name.

## SANDBOX TREATS



**T**he first night in my new home, my Human places me in a wire crate. It's much smaller than the one I've slept in with my littermates. But there is a soft cushion I don't have to share with my brothers and sisters who always took up too much space. My Human sits on the couch with a book and I try to keep an eye on her, but I'm very sleepy. It's been a big day and my eyes close. My Human's smell drifts around me and I feel safe.

A few hours later, the cat swishes by and flicks her tail against my crate. My eyes fly open. There are no warm littermates for me to snuggle against, it is very dark, and I can't smell my Human. I whimper as the fear overtakes me. I howl and cry.

My Human rushes into the room and flips on a switch. The room floods with light. She is holding a big pillow cushion and some blankets. It looks so warm and comfortable.

"Stormy?" She peers into my crate.



I smell her and stop crying, but I still whimper. I want out of here. I want to snuggle against her. I want to press myself against her so I know she is there. She doesn't understand how big this loneliness is in me. I've never felt something this horrible. I want out of the crate. I stand up on my hind legs and paw at the cage. "Please," I cry. "Please let me out."

"I knew this might happen tonight." My Human spreads out her pillow and blanket on the floor next to me.

I lie down with my nose at the crate door and stick my paw through the bars. I want her to take me out. I can sleep beside her on the big cushion pillow. I give her my best pleading look and whimper just a bit. "Take me out, please."

But my Human doesn't understand me. She sticks her hand into my crate and rubs my fur. It's better than nothing and after a long time, I close my eyes. I keep my paw on the outside of the crate bars. My Human continues to pet me until I fall asleep.

I wake up a couple of times and the room is dark again. I feel lonely, but I smell her. My Human is beside me, lying alongside my crate. It's not as good as sleeping next to her, curled up alongside her, but the big feeling of emptiness and sadness doesn't come back.

Soon, the morning light streams through the windows. I wake up and shake myself off. Cleo is staring at me from across the room. She smirks and struts to my Human. Cleo kneads her paws in my Human's hair for a long time. When my Human opens her eyes, Cleo dashes out of the room.

My Human sits up and groans. She rubs her back. My Human should get a soft cushion. I feel great!

I wiggle and wiggle. My stomach growls as I place my front paws on the ground and stick my rear end up in a nice stretch. The Human laughs and lifts the latch of the crate door.

I tumble out and dash around the room in a game of chase with Cleo. She never lets me capture her, but I come close a couple of times before she dashes onto the couch and sticks her paw into me. Cleo has sharp claws on the end of her paw. I yelp.

My Human rushes over and checks me. "Cleo!" she scolds.

Cleo smirks at me before she swishes out of the room.

"Stormy," my Human says in a very sweet voice. "Breakfast." She kneels by a food and water bowl not far from my crate. I waddle over to the bowls. I'm glad my Human has set my bowls near my bed! How nice of her!

My ears drop into the water bowl and she lifts them out for me. My face fits into the food bowl and I eat fast. I always ate fast with my littermates!

The food tastes different. It's not all liquid and soft food. It's crunchy and I chew hard. After I finish every bite, my stomach feels a little bit ouchy. I sniff for a good poop spot.

"No, Stormy." My Human carries me to the door where we came in last night. She places me in the grass.

I get a little distracted by the smells. I smell Cleo and birds and squirrels.

"Do your business, Stormy." My Human touches the grass.

I know what she means. My Breeder Human taught us to do our business.

After I poop, my Human claps her hands and in a high-pitched, excited voice tells me I am a good dog!

I strut toward her. Of course I am! I am going to be magnificent!

I want to explore the grass, but my Human scoops me up and places me back inside the house. There are lots of other rooms and stairs, but she takes me to the room with my pen and food bowls. The room is blocked off with chairs and Cleo jumps over all of them to get in and out of the room.

“I want to learn how to jump like you,” I tell Cleo.

She leaps over a chair cushion. “I can’t teach you,” Cleo says. “Only cats jump.”

I know that’s not true. My family knew how to leap over poles in agility. Cleo doesn’t know everything.

My Human sits on the floor and I sniff everything in the room. I try to sniff under the couch and chair, but I don’t fit very well. Instead, I find a hiding place behind a chair. I lie on my belly and wait while my Human tries to find me.

After a while, my Human lets me explore other rooms. I try to go up the stairs because I can smell her up there. There are a lot of her smells up the stairs. But she blocks the stairs with those chairs. Cleo hops over the chairs and sticks her paw out through the banister.

“This is off-limits to you,” Cleo purrs at me.

I don’t think it’s fair Cleo can go wherever she wants. I growl at her and she swipes her paw at me. I jump back. I don’t want to get her claws caught in my head.

Cleo hops down the stairs. I follow her to a box with a lot of what looks like sand. She poops in the sandbox and everything smells so good. Cleo covers up her poop with the

sand, but I can still smell it. As soon as she hops out, I stick my nose in the sandbox. I open my mouth to eat what Cleo has left, but my Human picks me up and shuts the door to the great treat sandbox.

“No, Stormy,” she says. Her voice is firm and strong.

I obey her because I don’t want to get in trouble on my first day.

But my Human can’t keep the door closed forever. Cleo won’t be able to get to her sandbox.

I will get some of Cleo’s treats soon!

# THE SCARY NIGHT



**I**t is a long day of play and fun with Cleo. I take many trips outside to sniff the grass and “do my business.” When it gets dark, my Human turns on a light and fills my food bowl. I enjoy the crunchy morsels as much as I did at breakfast and lunch.

Afterward, my Human takes me outside. This time she leads me to a different door than the one I have been using all day. We pass through a room that smells like food, food, and more food. I want to sniff everywhere, but she picks me up and carries me out the door.

Three big steps lead off a deck. A big grassy space is at the end of the steps, and I know that’s where I am supposed to poop and pee. But those steps seem really big.

Suddenly, there is lots of little dog barking from behind a fence in the back of the yard.

I barely think about the three steps and tumble down them. I race to the big fence and bark and bark and bark. I

know they are little dogs by the size and tone of their voice. Even as a puppy, I am bigger than them!

The Human laughs and claps her hands. I keep barking. I am magnificent! This is my job! I want those little dogs to know this is my house, my yard, and my Human. It's my job to tell those little dogs that I live here!

A female voice calls to the three small dogs and they give one last bark. I bark back at them.

"Do your business, Stormy," my Human calls from the top of the stairs. She claps her hands and laughs. "You are a good dog!"

"Woof." I bark at her in response. I have been so busy barking I have forgotten my job outside. I sniff around the grass and find a good spot.

When I am finished, I push my back legs against the grass and it flies in the air. My Human laughs and picks me up. She takes me back up the stairs and into the house. But she doesn't set me down to run around. Instead, she carries me to my crate and places me inside. She shuts the door. "Good night, Stormy."

My Human takes her place on the couch with her book. I close my eyes. I know when I wake up she will be on the floor beside me, just like last night.

But when I wake up a few hours later, I can't smell her. The lonely feeling is inside me again. It feels deep and awful. I whimper for my Human, but she doesn't come.

I howl.

I howl and howl and howl.

But my Human doesn't come to me. Did something

happen to my Human? Why doesn't she come sleep on the floor with me?

Cleo waltzes by my crate. "Shhh..." she purrs. "Our Human sleeps upstairs. She can't sleep on the floor every night. You must be a big dog and sleep by yourself."

"Sleep by myself?" I howl. "I can't sleep by myself. I am so lonely. Where do you sleep?" I don't want to sleep with Cleo, but she would be better than sleeping by myself!

"Dogs sleep in their crates." Cleo swishes her tail. "I sleep on our Human's bed."

Cleo sleeps on our Human's bed and I have to sleep by myself? She sleeps upstairs where it smells like my Human and I sleep alone? I howl even louder.

I miss my littermates. I miss their warm bodies. I do not want to be in this crate by myself!

I cry and cry but my Human doesn't come for me. I cry until I am so tired I can't cry anymore and fall asleep.

When the morning light appears, Cleo sits on the table. She smirks at me and swishes her tail.

"I want out." I place my paws in front of me and raise my back end in the air. It feels good to stretch.

"Howl," Cleo says. "It's morning. Our Human will get you."

I howl. This time I don't have to cry for long. My Human appears, her face bright and cheerful. She isn't rubbing her back this morning.

I am so happy to see her. I do a little wiggle dance. She doesn't know how long the night can be! I wiggle and jump around in my crate. She opens my crate and I tumble outside.

I know I need to go outside to do my business. I run to the back door. I'm getting used to the hardwood floor and only slip a little. My Human opens the door, and I tumble down the stairs and find my spot to pee. It's quiet this morning, except for the birds. They are very noisy, and I bark at them.

After I am finished, I follow my Human back into the room with my crate and food bowls. I eat while she removes the towel where I had a bit of an accident last night. I was so scared in my howling that a little pee leaked out of me. But my Human doesn't scold me, she just places the towel in the big machine by Cleo's sandbox.

Cleo hops inside her sandbox. I sniff and lick my lips. I can't wait for a tasty treat. But when I try to waddle over to the sandbox, my Human grabs me. I lick her nose. "It's okay. We can make a deal. No sandbox treat, but tonight you could bring your pillow and sleep with me."

I think she hears my deal because she says, "Oh, Stormy, you are so cute!" and gives me a big hug.

I am cute. I wiggle and lick her face again.

But I am also part of the Human's pack. She just needs to learn we sleep together. I will find a way to sleep in the Human's bed just like Cleo!



## WHERE IS MY TAIL?



**I**t takes a few more nights for me to stop crying for my Human. My Human buys me a big porcupine stuffed animal and I pretend it is one of my littermates. Sometimes Cleo sleeps on the couch next to my crate. She pretends she isn't watching me, but when I wake up in the middle of the night, her eyes stare at me in the darkness.

I am glad my crate is enclosed. I don't want Cleo sleeping in my crate with me, no matter how lonely I get. Her claws might get me in my sleep.

Every morning is the same routine. I love routine. Cleo prances by my crate as soon as the light comes into the room. I do my stretch and then whine, making sure my whine gets louder and louder until my Human appears. After breakfast, Cleo and I chase each other. I slide on the slippery floor and sometimes end up on my rear end. Cleo hides behind furniture, and as I dash by, her paw swipes me. She keeps her claws shielded inside her fur.

One morning, Cleo sits down in front of me. Her tail swishes around her. She stares at me. "You don't have a tail."

"Yes, I do." I run around in circles and try to see my tail.

"No," Cleo says. "It's gone."

My tail is gone? I whimper.

"Stormy?" My Human says. "What's wrong?" She bends to look into my eyes. I blink at her.

"My tail is gone. Someone has stolen my tail." I bark in high-pitched tones. I can't be magnificent without a tail. I creep under the chair and lie down on my stomach.

"Stormy?" My Human's face appears under the chair. "Are you sick? Do we need to go to the vet?"

I have visited the vet twice for shots. She is a young girl and I lick her face while she pokes me. I don't think the vet took my tail.

I stand up and look at my Human. "Where is my tail?"

My Human studies me. "I don't know what you want."

Cleo struts by and swishes her tail. My Human pets her and rubs her hand down her back and along her tail. This makes Cleo purr.

I stare at Cleo's tail. I stare and stare and stare. I look at my Human. "I don't have a tail!"

Light flashes across my Human's eyes. "Oh!" She says. "You need to out." She stands up and walks to the door. I don't follow her. I don't want to go out. I want to know where is my tail?

My Human frowns at me and shuts the door.

I continue to stare at my Human. Where is my tail?

"Our Human can't understand you." Cleo lies down on the rug and rolls onto her back.

I sit down. I feel my tail. It is back there. Why does Cleo say I don't have a tail? When I get excited, I can feel it wiggle. "I have a tail," I tell Cleo. I turn around so my back is to her.

"You don't have a tail. I'll show you."

Cleo leaps up a few of the steps. "Are you coming?"

My Human reads her book and doesn't notice Cleo and me on the stairs.

The stairs are big, but I can do it. It takes a couple of attempts to get up the first two stairs. My legs are short and the stairs are tall. I tumble down to the bottom but then learn how to move fast and push myself to the next step.

Cleo waits for me at the top. "Come on," she swishes her tail. "You are taking a long time."

I grunt and keep doing my two steps and a roll. Cleo doesn't know how hard this is with small legs. I hope my legs grow soon and I can bound up the stairs like Cleo.

At the top of the stairs, there is a slippery floor. Cleo waits for me in the doorway of a room with carpet. I don't need her to tell me this is our Human's room. I smell our Human all around me. It's comforting to be in her room. There is a big bed in the middle of the room. This is where she sleeps! This is where I should sleep! I place my paws on the bed and try to jump up. My legs are way too short and I roll to the ground in a tumble.

"You can't get up there," Cleo says. "And you shouldn't." She swishes her tail. "I told you, that is our Human's bed and I sleep with her. You sleep downstairs in your crate."

Cleo is very bossy. I am not sure I like her.

“Come over here,” Cleo says. “I will show you that your tail is missing.”

I waddle to Cleo and stop at a tall piece of what looks like glass. But instead of staring out at grass and birds, I am staring at myself. I lie down on the floor and place my paws against the glass. The Me looking back does the same thing. I move my paws, and the Me looking back’s paws move. It’s a game. There are two of Me. I move and jump and let out a little bark. The Me looking back does the same.

There are two of Me and we are both magnificent! This is such a fun piece of glass that Cleo showed me.

“No tail.” Cleo swishes her tail.

I stop the game with the Me looking back and turn around. I turn to the right. I turn to the left. Cleo is right. I have a small stub where my tail should be, but there is no tail.

I howl. I howl and howl. My tail is gone. Someone took my tail! I howl louder than I do at night alone in my crate. Where is my tail? I want a tail like Cleo!

Cleo dashes out of the room. “You are too loud!”

I howl louder.

My Human runs up the stairs and into the room. “Stormy!” She picks me up and holds me close to her. “It’s okay. Did you get lost? I am here.”

She carries me out of the room and down the stairs. I snuggle up against her. This is a much better way to come down the stairs than using my short legs. I forget about my missing tail.

In the living room, my Human sits down on the couch and pets me. “I’m right here.”

I sniff at the couch cushions. They smell like popcorn. I

find a small kernel tucked between two cushions and snarf it up. When I am finished sniffing the couch cushions, I place my head on my human's leg. "Where is my tail?"

"You are so cute," my Human says.

I am cute, but I am missing my tail. My Human doesn't understand me.

Cleo hops on the table and swishes her tail.

I growl at her.

"No, Stormy," my Human says. "You can't growl at Cleo. She is your friend."

Cleo smirks and swishes her tail around her back and forth. She leaps off the couch and heads toward her sandbox. Cleo is not my friend. Cleo has a tail and I do not.

## THE BULLY



**F**or many sleeps, the nights and days are the same. I sleep in my crate. My stuffed porcupine keeps me company when I am lonely for my littermates. Cleo visits in the night and stares at me from her table perch. Our Human doesn't like her on the table, but in the night she does what she wants. In the morning, Cleo swishes her tail against my crate.

"Wake up," she purrs. "Wake up."

I wake and whine for our Human.

When my Human opens my crate, I always sniff Cleo's tail. I want a tail like Cleo.

"You can't have my tail," she hisses. "Get your own."

I don't know how to get my own tail.

During the day, I run around my grassy area and leap off a stone wall. I enjoy barking at the dogs behind the fence. "My yard," I tell them. "My yard." Sometimes their Human yells and they stop barking. My Human never yells at me.

One day, my Human clips a long leash to my collar. I am

so excited. We are going for a walk. Cleo walks up and down our driveway all the time. I lie by the door and watch her. She jumps into the blackberry bushes, and sometimes she is gone for hours. I can smell worry on my Human when Cleo has been gone a very long time.

My Human walks me down the driveway. I bite at the leash, but it doesn't come off. When we get to the sidewalk, two big dogs come out of their house and charge toward me. I sit down and howl. I am so scared. They want to eat me!

My Human picks me up and holds me close. "It's okay, Stormy." She walks me down the driveway and to my safe grassy area.

I tremble. I don't want to take any more walks like Cleo.

In the yard, Cleo rolls in the grass. "Those dogs aren't scary," she says. "They live behind the fence. The raccoons are scary." She bats at a fly in the air. "The raccoons roam everywhere."

"Do they have tails?" I ask.

"Of course," Cleo purrs. "And sharp teeth and big claws. They eat puppies."

"And cats?" I ask her.

"Yes." Cleo dashes under the deck. She sticks her paw through the small space and bats at me.

I hope they never eat Cleo.

A few sleeps later, my Human places me in the back seat of the car. The car movement doesn't make me sick anymore. I have been in the car a couple of other times to go to a place that smells like medicine and animal fear. I get shots and treats for being a good dog.

This drive takes longer. I am so excited to see where we

are going. I stand up on the seat and place my paws on the window.

She brakes suddenly.

Thud.

I fall onto the floor of the back seat. Things spin and I can't quite get back on the seat.

My Human gets out and opens the back door. "Stormy? Are you okay?"

I shake myself off. I feel a little fuzzy.

My Human kisses my head in that way she does, lifts me out of the car, and clips my leash to my collar. I am nervous with the leash on my collar. I don't want to go for a walk. But I don't smell any big scary dogs. I pull on the leash, and it stretches to a grassy area. There are so many good smells! I add my pee mark to the other pees on the grassy area. I want everyone to know I have been here too!

I stretch the leash out as far out as I can go. I can get pretty far away from my Human on this leash.

"No! No!" A Human rushes out of a building and hands my Human a different leash. I can tell my Human is being scolded for something, but I'm not sure what. The tone in the Human's voice is not friendly. She doesn't even pet me. It's like she doesn't notice me. How can that be? I am magnificent! Everyone notices me!

My Human unclips the long leash and clips on the shorter leash. I can't stretch as far, so I tug hard. The leash snaps me back. But it's the stern Human on the other end. She tells my Human something. The way the leash is pulled tight, I am forced to stand at attention by my Human. I don't like this game very much.



We walk up a large hill to a big barn. I try to stay by her side. There are lots of other humans and puppies of all sizes and shapes in the barn. I'm a little nervous and stick close to my Human's legs. What is this place? Who are all these other puppies?

Suddenly, all the humans unclip leashes, and puppies bound everywhere. A few sniff me. Everyone has a tail. I get even more nervous. I stand in between my human's legs. She will protect me.

But I am wrong.

A large puppy bounds out of the shadows. He races to me. His jaws clamp on my neck. I howl in the loudest tone I can. It's much louder than the cry I used the second night calling for my Human. My cry is full of fear and panic. Everyone in the barn freezes. The stern Human yanks the dog away from me by the scruff of his neck. I shake and shake. I want to go home. I don't want to be here. My litter-mates never charged me. Cleo doesn't charge me. I bet Cleo would scratch that dog and defend me!

The mean puppy is removed from the barn, and the other puppies run and chase each other. I do not want to run and chase. I want to go home. I whine and press against my Human's leg. "Pick me up," I howl. I bet that dog attacked me because I don't have a tail!

The stern Human scoops me up. She places me and a Beagle in a big ring in the center of the barn. The Beagle sniffs me, and I sniff her. She smells like play. I want to ask her about her tail, but she is standing on her hind legs crying for her Human.

I try to sniff the Beagle and tell her it will be okay. We are

together in this protected space. My Human does this with me every day. She puts me in a large, enclosed space, and she goes upstairs. I play with my toys. I sleep. I watch Cleo. My Human takes me out to play in the grass afterward.

The Beagle continues to cry, and nothing I do helps her. I feel sad for her.

The stern Human lifts me out of the playpen. I am scared again. The other dogs will attack me because I don't have a tail. It's much safer to be in the pen with the crying Beagle. She doesn't notice I don't have a tail. I slink low in the sand on my belly and scurry to the first set of human legs I can find. I lie with my belly in the sand and rest between the legs while I watch the other dogs play. It looks like so much fun, and I want to play too. But what if they attack me because I don't have a tail?

The puppies keep sniffing me. "Play with us. Play?"

I want to play. I slink across the sand to where the dogs are playing. If I stay low in the sand, maybe they won't notice I don't have a tail. It feels good to slink on the thick sand. I am safe.

The Humans laugh. "Look at the Cocker Spaniel. He's Mr. Slink."

I continue my slink. I am a magnificent slinker. No one can tell I am missing a tail. No one attacks me.

After a while, I am tired. Slinking is hard work. I slink to my Human, and she clips the new leash to my collar. We leave with my new puppy friends. We walk behind a Golden Retriever who has a big fluffy tail.

Maybe he could share his tail with me.

## THE SANDCASTLE



A few sleeps pass and my Human and I are back in the car. This time I can't leap and jump on the seat. A strong leather leash keeps me tethered to the headrest on my back seat. But there is enough room on the leash for me to lie down on the seat. My Human spreads a thick, fluffy towel for me on the seat, and I get treats for lying down. I spend a lot of the car ride lying down and waiting for a treat.

My Human pulls onto the gravel road. I stand up and sniff at the air coming through the open windows. I smell other dogs and excitement! My Human parks in front of the grassy play area and brakes hard. The leather leash pulls on my collar and keeps me from falling off the seat.

My Human opens the door, unties my leash, and lifts me out of the back seat. I smell dogs, but I don't see any in the grassy play area. I pull on the leash toward the barn where I played Mr. Slink, but my Human leads me in the opposite direction. We walk to a building and into a room where

Humans sit on chairs in a circle, and puppies of all shapes and sizes sit and stand at their feet. My friends from my play-date are all here! I wiggle my back end at them as we pass.

The Humans laugh and call out, "Mr. Slink!" No one says anything about my missing tail.

But there is something else in this room that is very intriguing! I have never seen anything like it!

It's tall, and when I sniff, there are all kinds of smells of little Humans and other dogs. The big thing moves when I lean against it, and I lift my leg to pee and leave my mark with the other smells.

"Oh no, you don't!" The stern Human squirts something that smells like vinegar where I have peed. "You cannot pee on my sandcastle!"

I dance away from the awful smell. I will get back to the sandcastle!

My Human guides me to a chair by the door. There are all kinds of good smells coming from outside. I don't know what all of the smells are, and I pull toward outside so I can explore. Suddenly, my Human's foot clamps down on my leash. I sit because that's the only thing I can do with her foot on my leash. She smiles at me. The other puppies have also moved into a sit, and every Human has their foot on a puppy's leash. What game is this where we all have to sit?

The stern Human steps into the center of the circle. A Labrador is beside her. The Lab is older than me but not by much. Labs are goofy. In our puppy playtime, Labs are always followers, never leaders. I am a leader. At home, I made up a game for Cleo and me. We jump off the brick wall in the backyard, and I race around the bushes. My Human

laughs and says I've made up an agility course. Of course I have! I am magnificent. This Lab does not look magnificent at all.

The puppies are called into the center of the circle to play together. I'm not so interested in playing and head for the castle. The stern lady called it a sandcastle, but there isn't any sand around it. The wind from the open door makes the sandcastle move, and I sniff to find other places to leave my mark, but the stern Human has a spray bottle and squirts me. The vinegar is strong, and I run to the center of the circle and chase the Beagle. The Beagle is not so whiny in the circle where she is not enclosed and can run to her Human. We race around the circle three times, and I slide on the floor. Each time I try to break out of the circle and head for the sandcastle, but the stern Human waves her vinegar bottle at me.

A sharp whistle sounds, and my Human calls for me. I don't run to her fast like some of my puppy pals. I eye the sandcastle again and take two paw steps toward it. The stern Human sprays her vinegar in the air.

My Human calls me again, and I redirect to her. When I get close, she leans forward and snaps the leash onto my collar. She hands me a treat from a small bag she wears attached to her jeans.

I gobble the treat and sit by her side. All my puppy pals are doing the same thing. The three Labs in the circle are the best at this game. They get a lot of treats. Labs like doing what they are told to do.

The stern Human calls for all of us to move back to the circle. But this time it is only the small dogs and there is

more space for us to run around in the circle. The Labs and other big dogs get chew bones while they stay by their Humans. After a couple of races around the circle with my Beagle friend, my Human's voice calls to me. I am having a good time chasing my Beagle friend, and it takes me a little longer to untangle myself from the play.

And this time, I know what happens when I run to my Human. She will attach the leash and give me a treat. But I am going to outwit her. It's a fun game, and I will show her how to play it. The winner will get to go inside the floppy sandcastle. I know I will be the winner!

"Stormy!" My Human holds out a cheese treat but before she can reach me, I snatch it and dance away so she can't attach the leash. I don't go too far, but far enough she can't reach me. She tries to grab me, and I dash in the other direction. It's a great game, and I am having a lot of fun. I sit and wait for my Human to make the next move.

The stern Human steps behind me and pushes me along my back end to my Human with her foot. Snap. The leash is attached to my collar, and this time there is no treat.

I plunk down on my belly beside my Human.

Point for the Human.

In the center of the circle, the stern Human kneels with her legs splayed apart. She takes the Labrador and places him between her legs. Suddenly, she flips him onto his back and holds him between her knees. The Labrador doesn't squirm or move. He lies there like a dead dog looking up at the stern Human. I whine. This looks like a horrible game!

My Human kneels beside me. I whine some more. I do not want to play this game. But my Human doesn't listen.

She picks me up, turns me over so my belly faces the sky and places me between her legs. She forces me to lie still by holding her legs strong against me. I hate it. I hate it. I hate it. I squirm. I arch my back. I whine. I wiggle my legs in the air. I am not supposed to be upside down. Dogs should not be upside down! I am exposed! Something awful could attack me!

My Human increases the pressure in her legs as she holds me between her two knees. I keep arching my back and finally flip myself out of her grasp. I shake myself off. Whew! That was horrible!

All my puppy friends are lying between Human's legs. They have goofy looks on their faces. I am the only one who has escaped. I am magnificent!

The stern Human stands over me. She nods to my Human.

I smell my Human's anxiety. "It's okay." I press against my Human. "We don't have to play that game again."

But my Human doesn't understand me! She grabs me and flips me upside down again. I am back in position between her legs. Only this time I can't squirm. She places her hand on my chest and keeps me on the ground.

Her voice is soft and she strokes my belly. She rubs my ears in my favorite spot. It feels nice and I stop struggling. I sink against her and relax into her touch. I look up at her.

"I trust you, Human," I tell her. "You win this game."

"You are a good dog, Stormy," she says.

I smell her love all around me.

We both win this game.

But next time, I will win the sandcastle game.

## HOOPS AND TUNNELS



**B**ut I do not win the sandcastle game. The sandcastle is gone when we come to the next class. Over the next month, we spend a lot of time in the room without the sandcastle. I learn to sit, stay, and come when my Human calls my name. I am magnificent with everything except walk on a leash. It's hard for me to walk on my leash. I get very excited and pull my Human along behind me. My Human runs to keep up with me. The stern Human tells us we need to keep practicing. I think my Human needs to learn to walk at my speed.

One afternoon, we walk up the hill to the barn where I have my puppy playdates. Inside the barn, some things are very familiar to me: A long tunnel. A set of poles. A long pole on top of two posts. A tire hanging from a string. These are what my uncle and grandma used to practice in the yard. This is how you learn to be magnificent. I am born for this class. This is where I will get blue ribbons, and my Human



will frame pictures of me along the hallway wall. There is a big wall by the stairs that doesn't have any pictures. I would look perfect on those walls! I am not going to be a pet dog. I am going to learn to do agility just like my family!

I am so excited I pull and pull on the leash until the Human finally steps her foot on it, and I have to sit down beside her. I don't mind. The other puppies are also sitting next to their Humans. We are getting instructions.

The Trainer Human stands in the middle of the arena and tells the Humans they are going to run with us on the course. The Humans will help guide us through the tunnels, poles, and hoops. I feel my Human tense beside me. I press up against her. "It will be okay," I tell her. "I will run slow for you. I know you can't keep up with me."

My Human leans down and pets my head. I wiggle under her hand. The classes are teaching her to understand me.

The Humans and dogs line up. The dogs are all five months old. All of us are almost the size we will be as grown dogs, but we look scrawny because we haven't filled out yet. The first two dogs are Shih Tzu and both run through the tunnels very fast. The Humans all clap when they come out the other side. I am not impressed. Shih Tzu always run fast. I have two Shih Tzu puppy friends. We go to their house and play run-around games. They always win.

When it's our turn, I pull on the leash, but my Human keeps up with me. We run together over the soft sand. It's fun, and I run fast. Really fast. I forget about my promise to go slow so my Human can keep up with me. My Human

breathes hard, but I am so excited to run into the tunnel I can't slow down.

I scurry inside the inflatable tunnel as my Human walks on the outside. Her shadow keeps me company when I am in the tunnel. I sniff. The tunnel smells like special treats. Really good special treats. I stop in the middle and sniff everywhere. I am not coming out until I find the treats.

"Stormy!" My Human calls to me from the other end. I see her, but I'm interested in finding the crumbs of the special treats that have been left inside the tunnel.

My Human holds out some of the cheese at the end of the tunnel. It smells good, but whatever has been in this tunnel smells much better. I sniff and find a few crumbs of what tastes like peanut butter. My Human gives me peanut butter in a toy, and I have to work hard to eat the peanut butter. I love peanut butter.

"Stormy." My Human calls in her light and friendly voice she learned to use in our class. Usually, I run right to her, but I want to finish my peanut butter treat. After I lick all the crumbs off the tunnel, I dance toward her. But I stop short when I reach her. I want her to play with me inside the tunnel. I want her to see how much fun it is in the tunnel. I wiggle and dance and move far enough away she can't reach me. I want her to get in the tunnel with me!

"Stormy!" She opens her palm. A large cheese treat sits in the middle.

I dance forward and grab a bite and slip out of her reaching hand. Wiggling and dancing I move to the middle of the tunnel. I love this game! The stern Human isn't here

to push me forward like she does on the slippery classroom floors.

Suddenly, my Human is inside the tunnel with me on her hands and knees. She is just like me on my four legs. This is so much fun. My Human is eye level with me!

But instead of playing in the tunnel with me, she grabs me by the scruff of my neck with one hand and holds out the cheese with her other. I don't like this game!

My Human drags me with her to the end of the tunnel. When we come out of the tunnel, the other Humans applaud us. I wiggle and do my special turn-around dance. I have shown everyone my game. I am magnificent. No other dog makes up a game in the tunnel!

As we wait in line for the hoops, a Labrador won't get in the tunnels. He is afraid. I bark. He is not going to be magnificent like me! I was not scared of the tunnels. I bark again. My Human looks at me like I am in trouble. I stop barking. I don't want to leave this fun game.

We wait in line and watch as a Human and one of the Shih Tzu runs up to the hoop. The Shih Tzu jumps through, and the Human drops the leash after the dog gets inside the hoop. Everyone applauds as the Shih Tzu lands on the other side, the leash flying after it and dropping on the sand.

The hoops don't seem as much fun as the tunnels to me.

When it is our turn, I remember how my Human felt about the course and not running too fast. Last time, I was in a hurry to get to the tunnels, but now I walk slowly so she can keep up with me. She gives me little tugs on my leash to hurry me along, but I won't run. I am keeping my part of the bargain and walking slowly for her.

We reach the hoop, and I place one leg through the circle and then the other. I stop when I am on the other side and turn to my Human, waiting for my cheese snack.

She stares at me like she doesn't know who I am.

I stare back. I am going slow for her. I am helping her learn the course. Doesn't she understand?

## GAMES



**T**wo Humans are visiting me! They arrive with big bags and open them in the room across the hallway from where my Human sleeps. Cleo gets into the bags and hides in them while I sniff them. The bags smell like other animals. Cat and dog smells! Will a cat or dog jump out of the bag?

"Stormy!" My Human gives me a nudge away from the bags. She doesn't see Cleo, who is buried inside one of the bags.

"He's so cute," one of the Guest Humans says in that high-pitched voice Humans use around me.

The Guest Humans hold out their hands, and I sniff. One of them smells like many life experiences, and the other one smells like woods and grass without so many life experiences. Both are female Humans and have a similar smell to my Human. They are part of my Human's family and she calls one sister and one aunt.

I am happy to see them and wiggle and dance. Both continue with the high-pitched squeals.

Cleo sticks her head out of the bag. The Humans don't squeal around her. She bats at their hands when they try to pet her and hisses. Cleo is a very bad hostess even if she does have a tail that she squishes around the bedposts.

I want to show the Guest Humans all my toys. My legs have gotten longer, and I can race up and down the stairs very fast. I hurl myself over the last step and dash into my zippy crate where I keep my toys. I grab my stuffed porcupine and bring it out of the crate. I dance around the Guest Humans with the stuffed porcupine in my mouth. When they try to grab my stuffed friend, I dance away. I have practiced this move in my training classes when my Human tries to grab me by holding a treat out. I am very good with this dance of "you can't get me."

Everyone laughs at my porcupine game.

At night, my Human motions for me to get into my zippy crate. I want to show the Guest Humans how magnificent I am and go right inside. I don't whine at all when my Human zips up the side. I settle into the soft bed and make sure to position my head so my long floppy ears lay over the edges. I blink my eyes rapidly at the Humans.

The Guest Humans give that high-pitched squeal again and call me a good dog.

I close my eyes, just to show them I can go right to sleep.

I am tired from the stuffed porcupine game and go right to sleep. But I don't stay asleep. When the sky is very dark, there is yelling upstairs. Cleo's claws scratch the floor above

me, and she bounds down the stairs. She stops in front of my zippy crate and licks her paws.

"What are you doing?" I paw at my zippy crate.

"I am playing a game with the Guest Humans," she says between licks.

I want to play games with the Guest Humans and whine.

A door upstairs slams, and Cleo leaps out of the room and flies up the stairs. Her paws scratch on the floor above me, and a Guest Human yells, "Aha!"

Cleo hisses and thuds back down the stairs.

"Cleo!" I whine. "I want to play too."

Cleo smirks at me. "This game is just for cats. You are supposed to be sleeping."

I don't want to go back to sleep. I want to play with Cleo and the Guest Humans. I whine again.

It's quiet upstairs, and Cleo lies down on the couch. She watches me as she listens for the Humans upstairs.

I close my eyes. Cleo's game is too much listening and waiting.

The next day, I show my Guest Humans how I bark at the dogs in the backyard. I wiggle and dance when they get yelled at by their Human. The Guest Humans clap for me. I fly off the back wall and run on the slippery house floors. And I bring the Guest Humans my stuffed porcupine for many games of tug of war. I like this game the best. I keep the stuffed porcupine in my mouth, and one of the Guest Humans holds onto the other end. She pulls at the same time as me. The stuffed porcupine gets a hole, and I pull out all the stuffing. Now he is a flat porcupine, but I still love him.

That night I wait for Cleo's game, but it's quiet upstairs. Cleo doesn't sit on her couch perch, and I don't know where she is all night. I don't hear her munching on her food, and I don't smell her in her sandbox. I curl against flat porcupine and hope Cleo isn't lost.

In the morning, Cleo prances downstairs. She is in her sandbox for a long time and then eats her bowl of food.

"I got locked in the Human's bedroom," she says between cleaning licks. "The Guest Humans didn't like my game."

I am glad Cleo's game ended. I didn't like it either because I couldn't play with her.

While the Humans are eating on the porch, I sneak into Cleo's sandbox and eat three of her tasty treats. I hope she gets locked into the Human's bedroom more often. It makes her leave more treats at one time in the sandbox. I leave some of her sand and a few tiny treat pieces on the floor.

My Human finds the mess I left on the floor. She eyes me. "Did you eat Cleo's poop?"

I wiggle and dance. Cleo's tasty sandbox treats are very good.

My Human smiles at me. "I guess Cleo made the mess," she says.

I bark my short happy bark. I'm glad my Human hasn't learned how to communicate very well with me yet.





After I eat my dinner, my Human places me in the car. One of the Guest Humans sits in the back seat with me. She pets me, and I stand against her to see out the window. Everything rushes by in a blur. I feel a little sick and lean against the Guest Human until we stop at my training school.

The swirly stops, and I am so excited. We are going to my agility class, and the Guest Humans can see my magnificence!

I do my best to walk beside my Human up the hill to the barn. I only pull a little, and the Guest Humans squeal and tell me I am doing great!

Tonight, the first agility game is the tunnel. My favorite! The Labrador goes first and still won't go into the tunnel. He sits down at the door and places his head between his paws. He won't get up no matter how hard his Human tries to motivate him with treats.

His Human gives up and they walk to the hoop. It's my turn next, and I dart right into the tunnel. I love the tunnel game! I wait until my Human's face appears at the other end, then I dart forward and grab the cheese. She climbs into the middle, but she can't get me. I am too fast, and I know what she is trying to do—grab the scruff of my neck and pull me out.

Suddenly, the tunnel is moving. It is being dumped upside down, and I am going to be tossed on my back! I scurry to the end and out the other side. My Human won this time! She grabs my leash, and we run to the tire hoop.

The Guest Humans cheer for me. "Stormy! Stormy!"

At the tire hoop, I repeat the same process as last week, one leg in slowly and then the other.

The Guest Humans cheer louder.

I am magnificent!

I run to the poles where I weave. I run very fast, and my Human pants behind me. I like the weaving poles. They move as I weave through them, and I get more applause from the Guest Humans. The Trainer Human calls to my Human she can drop my leash because I am doing so well.

Suddenly, my leash is flying along beside me, and my Human is not attached. I can run as fast as I want.

And now I am very excited. I want everyone to know how magnificent I am! I am unattached from my Human!

I'm not sure where I am supposed to run to next. My Human isn't running beside me and everything seems really big. But I don't want to stop. I charge at the other dogs in the line waiting their turn.

I am magnificent!

My brain whirls.

I am the king of agility!

The little Shih Tzu dog, named Buster, who has been so good in all the agility games, is running fast to the tunnels. I want to show him I am the boss, and I charge toward Buster. I get him in a grip around the neck and shake him. I am so powerful. I don't know what has taken over me, but I feel so strong! This is what magnificence looks like! Blue ribbons are mine!

Suddenly, I am jerked off my feet, and Buster flies out of my mouth.

I am tossed to the ground and lie upside down between two legs. My back presses on the soft sand, only this time it's

not like when the Human practiced with me and I lie against her chest and she stroked my fur.

This time, a large hand clamps itself on my chest and makes it so I can't get up.

All the wanting to be powerful goes away, and I just want my Human. I cry out in a howl.

I am released from the upside-down position, and I run to my Human. She picks up my leash, and the Trainer Human says something in her mean voice to us. I tuck my non-existent tail between my legs and walk beside my Human out of the arena.

My Human leans down by my side when we are outside. Tears are in her eyes. "Stormy. You're not an aggressive dog. Why did you do that?"

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." I lean against her. This is why my family didn't want me to be an agility dog. I'm not sure how to control myself. The energy just seems to explode. Something takes over me and I can't stop it.

I look up at my Human. "Can you help me?" I plead with her.

My Human kneels beside me and wraps her arms around me. I lean against her. I don't want to be an aggressive dog. I like other dogs. But something happened to me in the agility game.

In a few minutes, we go back into the arena and stand far away from the other dogs. The Guest Humans stand beside us. My Human talks to them as I lie down in the sand with my head between my paws. The other puppies run through the agility course.

I will never be a magnificent agility dog like my family.

# THE RACCOONS



One morning, when the air is cool and the leaves are starting to fall on the deck, Cleo slips outside. She doesn't return when my Human calls her. My Human smells worried as she places me inside my zippy crate and picks up her keys. I have never been left alone when Cleo is not in the house with me. It's lonely, and I lie on my stomach. I keep watch out the double doors with the big glass windows. There are lots of birds in the trees, and the raccoon family is out by the side of the deck where I am not allowed.

The big raccoon lumbers up the hillside where my Human never lets me go. Even on my leash, I am not allowed near the hillside with all the sticky blackberry bushes that border our house. Sometimes Cleo darts into the bushes. But my Human never sees her.

My Human returns, and Cleo does not come inside. The scent of fear is strong on my Human. My Human calls for Cleo while I run into the backyard. I pee and try to sniff

to see if I can find her. I smell raccoon, but I can't smell Cleo.

My Human lets me inside, and I follow her to the front door. She opens the door while I stand beside her. I am not allowed to step out the front door without my leash. My Human and I have practiced opening the door and pretending Humans are on the other side. I always have to stand and wait. My Human gives me lots of treats to help me learn to wait. I am very good with this task.

"Oh!" My Human says in a voice I have never heard her use. She runs to my zippy crate and grabs my towel. She runs back to the front door. I stand behind her and try to see what she is doing when she leans down by the big chair. I smell Cleo. But it doesn't smell good. It smells like blood and pain.

My Huma picks up Cleo inside the towel and holds her close to her chest. "Cleo!" My Human's scent of fear and worry is the strongest I have ever smelt. I don't know how to make it better for my Human. Cleo smells very bad.

My Human gets Cleo's crate out of the closet. I have only seen Cleo get into that crate once when she went to the doctor with me. That day, I stood quietly while the doctor gave me shots. But when it was Cleo's turn, she hissed and yowled and clawed at the doctor and her assistant. They finally had to wrap her in a towel and give her the shot. She hissed and howled all the way home inside her crate. Now Cleo barely moves as my Human places her inside the crate. I sniff and place my nose against the crate door.

"Hang in there, Cleo," I say. "I'll see you when you feel better." It's something Humans don't understand but in the animal world, I will see Cleo when she is better. One day,

Cleo will greet me again. When my job with my Human is done and I move through the mists of the worlds that exist all around us, Cleo will be there to greet me again as her feisty self just as she did when I first came home with my Human.

But now Cleo doesn't talk to me like she usually does. She doesn't tell me how she has a tail and I don't. She doesn't lecture me about sleeping in my crate. It is very silent inside the crate. Cleo is very hurt. The raccoons have hurt her.

My Human leaves and forgets to put me in my crate. I jump up on the couch and bury myself in the cushions that always smell like popcorn. I look out the window. The raccoon family is gone now.

My Human is gone for a long time, and it is dark when she returns. She doesn't get mad at me for greeting her at the door. I think she forgot I was supposed to be in my crate when she is not home. She carries Cleo's empty crate and sets it on a shelf in the closet.

Tears run out of my Human's eyes, and the smell of sadness is all around us. I try to wiggle and tell her how much I love her. I know she loves Cleo, but I hope I can cheer her up. She lets me outside to pee, and I come right back inside. Today is not a day for playing games in the yard. My Human feeds me and then takes me upstairs, and we get into her bed. I have never been in her bed. It is soft and smells like her. It is the most comforting place I have ever known. She pulls the covers over us and sobs. I curl against her. My body presses against her legs. The bottom of the bed where Cleo sleeps is empty. I try to take up enough space for both of us.

In the middle of the night, I see my friend Cleo. She is a misty form sitting on the dresser. "Take care of our Human," she tells me.

"I will," I tell Cleo.

Cleo swishes her tail, and then the image of her is gone.

My Human rolls against me. I curl up beside her.

"I am here," I tell my Human. "I will watch over you."

The next night, my Human places me in my zippy crate. She goes upstairs to her bed and a big noise comes from the closet behind me. It is the closet where Cleo used to leave her sandbox treats. The noise is so loud, and I have never heard sounds like that. It sounds like a big monster is about to come out of the closet and get me!

Cleo is not here to tell me what the noise in the closet is, and I howl. I am petrified the monster in the closet is going to get me, and I don't have my friend Cleo to save me with her claws.

I howl and howl.

## BEACH TRIP



**M**y Human runs into the room and opens my zippy crate. I scurry out. She grabs my crate, blankets, and toys and carries them upstairs to her bedroom. I bound up the stairs behind her. We are going to her bedroom! I won't have to sleep downstairs by the loud monster in the closet!

My Human plunks the zippy crate with all my bedding and toys beside her bed. She places me inside and zips the crate closed. I don't want to sleep in my zippy crate. I want to sleep in the bed with her! I whimper.

My Human leans over the bed and talks to me in her soothing voice. It's not working, and I keep whining. I want to be in bed with her. Cleo is no longer here. My Human needs an animal in her bed to keep her company!

Finally, my Human opens the zippy crate. She picks me up and sets me on her bed. I turn around looking for a good spot to lie down. I don't want to sleep at the bottom of the



bed. That was Cleo's space. There is a pillow right beside my Human. She has a place ready for me!

I stretch out beside my Human and place my head on the soft pillow beside her. We are a pack.

A few days later, my Human packs a lot of clothing into a big bag. I try to get inside the bag and lie down. She laughs at me. My Human places my food bin in a bag too and lays my special blanket across the top. I wiggle and dance around the room. We are going somewhere special! My food bin never goes with us when we go to the park or dog training classes.

By the time everything is loaded into the car, I am so excited I can barely stand it. I run around in circles, and my Human can barely clip the leash to me. I jump into the back seat of the car, and she ties my leash to the headrest. I pace back and forth on the seat.

"Sit down, Stormy," my Human says. She repeats "sit down, Stormy" a lot. Finally, I get tired and lie down to take a nap.

On our drive, we stop a couple of times at grassy areas. I do my business in grass that smells like lots of dogs. There are Humans having picnics, and it smells so good. But my Human won't let me get near any of the Human picnics. I have never tasted Human food. I am only allowed to eat my food, and sometimes I ate crumbs of Cleo's food. I lick my lips. I want to eat Human food.

After we have driven for a long time and I have taken many naps, my Human stops the car. She opens the door and unties my leash from the seat. I hop onto the ground and sniff. Salt air is all around us. Birds soar over us and cry

loudly. I like to bark at the birds in our backyard, but we don't have these kinds of birds. These birds are big, loud, and scary. I duck behind my Human's legs.

"It's okay, Stormy," my Human says and opens the back of the car. She lifts out my food bag and her clothing bag. "This is the beach."

There are a lot of other dog smells as we walk up a set of stairs to a balcony. My Human unlocks the door. She releases my leash, and I bound into the room and jump on the leather couch. It smells like other dogs. A lot of other dogs.

My Human eyes me. "Don't pee, Stormy," she says in that firm voice. I am a big dog and I do not have accidents in the house, but this seems like I should leave my mark somewhere just like the other dogs. I will just wait until she is not looking and then leave a little mark, just like all the other dogs who have been here too.

I jump off and go outside to stand on the deck like we have at home. But unlike home, I can look down and see the sand and water and lots of Humans. There are Humans everywhere. There are also lots of good Human food smells. The Humans are all walking up and down the beach. Dogs run off-leash. I whine. A couple of the Humans look up at me and smile and wave. I wiggle, which makes more Humans smile and wave at me.

Another Human who smells like my Human joins me on the deck. I know she must be part of my Human's family pack because of the way she smells so much like my Human. All Humans have their own smells, and the ones who are related smell like each other. She opens a box and hamburger smells are all around me. My Human never lets me have food

that she eats. No matter how hard I try to look at her like I am starving, it never works.

I whine and whine. I want some of the hamburger!

"Mom! No!" My Human says in her mean voice. "Stormy can't have Human food."

I don't want my Human to be mad at me. I am trying to be magnificent. But I don't know why I can't have Human food and still be magnificent!

My Human doesn't like my whining and clips my leash to me. She leads me to a chair and ties my leash around the chair leg. She places one of my treats in front of me and points for me to lie down. I plop on the floor and eat the treat. It's not nearly as good as the Human food smells. But I have made my Human happy again. She pets me and I lick her hand.

The Humans eat their food, and I keep my eye on them. When they are finished, Mom Human unties me. I dance around and follow her into the kitchen. She opens a big dish cleaning machine. We have one of these at our house too. Usually, my Human keeps me in my zippy crate when she loads the cleaning machine. But my zippy crate is not with us.

When my Human is not watching, I place my paws on the machine's open door and lick at one of the plates.

Mom Human places more of the dishes in the cleaning machine. I lick all of them. Even though the plates don't have Human food on them, I can still taste the crumbs of the hamburger meat. After I am done licking, the plates are very clean. I am helping the Humans!

"Stormy!" My Human lifts me away from the cleaning machine door and closes it. "No Human food!"

I dance away. I have had a taste of Human food. And I want more. I want the whole morsel, not just the hint of what was on the plate in my licking.

Mom Human goes onto the porch. She carries a bowl of Human food. It smells like butter and salt and corn.

I follow her onto the porch. I sit down in my best sit in front of her. I give her my best magnificent look and blink my eyes at her. I am a well-trained dog. I should have Human food as my reward. My Human can't get mad at me for showing my training skills to Mom Human.

It works! Mom Human places a handful of her Human food at my feet. It is just like when I get my cheese dog training treats, but this is not dog training treats. This is Human food.

I chew every bite, and Mom Human places more at my feet.

I am eating Human food. It is fabulous!

"Mom!" My Human shrieks. She yanks me by the collar. "Stormy is not allowed to have popcorn! He is in training! He has never had our food!"

I struggle to get away from my Human's grasp. I want more Human food! I was magnificent. I sit and wait. Mom Human rewards me with Human food!

"It was just a little popcorn," Mom Human says and smiles at me.

"No," My Human says in that voice. The voice she uses for me when I am in trouble.

I give Mom Human my best pleading look. "Please. More Human food."

The two Humans have a conversation, and I hear my name. I lie down with my head between my paws and watch the Humans on the beach below the deck. I bet there is more Human food out there. I want to go to the beach. I whine a little. The Humans keep talking. I whine a little more.

My Human stands and grabs my leash. "Stormy wants to go to the beach," she says. I wiggle and jump up. My Human is not mad at me!

We walk down the stairs and toward the water. But something is different. The ground! It's not dirt. It's not the hard pavement. It's sand like we have at the puppy playdates! I start digging. I am digging and sand is flying everywhere. I shake my whole body. I am so excited.

The Humans laugh, and I dig even more. I dig until I have an entire spot for my whole body and plop down. The smells are everywhere. Fish. Seaweed. Salt.

I stand and pull on my leash. I want to explore! My Human doesn't take me too close to the water. That's okay. I'm not sure I want to get into that water. I've never been a big fan of water and this water seems a little scary. It has big waves with large swells. They seem like they are much bigger than me and if I got too close to the water, I might end up far away from my Human and never able to get back

"Can he go off-leash?" Mom Human asks my Human.

I like Mom Human. She feeds me tasty Human treats and now she thinks I can go off-leash. Other dogs are running without their leash. I want to be off-leash too. Just like at the park, only with so much more room.

The Human has my ball in her hand. She leans down and unclaps my leash, and I can feel her fear.

"It's okay," I reassure her. "I love you. I won't leave you."

I dance and wiggle and wait for her to throw the ball. She hurls it and the ball travels so much further than at the dog park, where the grass slows it down. It rolls on the sand and keeps rolling. I run and run and run. I am so free. Finally, I get to the ball. My jaws clamp down on it, and I race back to her.

When I reach my Human, I dance around her in a little dance, just like I do at the parks. She laughs. Her fear smell is gone.

I drop the ball and wait for her to throw it again.

But as I wait, my stomach feels funny. I walk away from my Human and squat. I push hard. I can feel the Human food inside me. It makes my stomach hurt. A long string of messy diarrhea comes out of me.

"Oh no!" My Human scoops it up. "Are you sick, Stormy?"

I walk around in a slow circle. I don't feel very good. I don't want to be off-leash. I don't want to play with my ball.

My Human clips my leash to my collar. We walk back to the place with the balcony. On the way, I have more long messy poop on the sand.

# THE NEW CAT



I sleep for a long time on the couch. When I wake up, my Human gives me dinner. My stomach feels better and after dinner, we go for a walk on the beach. This time I stay on my leash.

A small Human runs up to me. "What's your dog's name?" he asks.

"Stormy," my Human tells him.

I wiggle. I love this small human. He is just my size. He smells like joy and hope. We are at eye level as he pets me. "Can he make lightning?" the small Human asks.

My Human and Mom Human laugh. I wiggle and press against the small Human's legs. He knows that I am magnificent. I am so magnificent that he thinks I can make lightning!

When we get home from the beach trip, two exciting things happen. The first is a lot of those little Humans come to our door. One after another they come to our porch, and my Human opens the door and holds out a bowl of Human

food. The food is wrapped up, but I can still smell sweet. My Human still doesn't let me have Human food, but I help lick the dishes in the cleaning machine. Some nights she leaves a lot of Human food scraps on the plates.

The night the little Humans come to my door I am so excited! Little Humans are my favorite Humans, and tonight they are all at the door. They must be here to visit me! I stand next to my Human at the door, and when she holds out the bowl and the little Humans take the sweet food, I sniff at the little Humans. They smell sweet and sugary and like the night. Their voices call up and down the driveway as groups of them leave and more run to our doorstep. Sometimes one of the sweet treats drops to the ground, but the little Humans scoop it back into their bags before I can even sniff! The night seems to last forever with the little Humans visiting us, and I am wiped out by the time the night ends! There are so many little Humans at our door! All of them want to pet me and giggle when I wiggle around them. Sometimes a very small Human cries and I smell fear. I stand very still until a big Human picks up the little Human. I never jump on the little Humans. I have been trained to stay with all four paws on the floor when I greet people.

The second exciting thing that happens is my Human brings home an animal in a box. It smells a bit like Cleo, and the box moves and shakes as my Human carries it into the house. My Human pours cat sand into a tray and pours food into a bowl, but it's not Cleo's bowl or tray. Everything is brand new. My Human doesn't leave the sandbox tray or food bowls in the closet with the noisy monster who scared me. She carries everything into the room by the kitchen,



including the box with the moving animal inside. My Human closes the doors to the room, but I can still see inside because the door has a lot of windows.

I lie by the door and place my nose against the windows. A black and white cat gets out of the box. She is bigger than Cleo and not as quick. She moves very methodically around the room sniffing everything. My Human enters the room from another door by the kitchen. She tries to pick the cat up. But the cat claws at my Human and my Human drops her to the ground in a thump. I snarl. No one hurts my Human! The cat sits on the other side of the door and stares back at me through the glass.

"I'm Stormy," I tell the cat.

The cat stares at me. She keeps her tail curled around her.

I lie on my belly so she can't see I don't have a tail like hers.

"Do you have a name?" I want her to talk to me like Cleo. The Human and I still have struggles understanding each other. But I always understand other dogs and cats.

"Tattoo," the cat says. "But that's not my name. That's the name they gave me at the shelter." She licks one paw.

"The shelter?" I slither forward on my stomach and press my nose against the glass. "What is a shelter?"

Tattoo studies me. Her eyes are deep and dark. "A shelter is where you go when your Humans don't want you. You sit in a small crate and wait until a Human comes to take you home. Sometimes a Human never comes for you and then..." She doesn't finish.

"When your Humans don't want you?" My heart pounds. "My Human always wants me." I jump to standing.

Tattoo licks her other paw. "Don't be too sure," she says. "Humans leave us in the shelter for all kinds of reasons. If you poop in the house. If you don't do what they want. If they get a new animal or a baby Human."

I get very still. Is my Human going to take me to this place called the shelter now that this new cat is here? Will I have to sit in a crate and wait for someone to get me? I don't spend very much time in my zippy crate anymore. I sleep on my Human's bed at night. When she works in the day, she ties my leash to her desk and I sit with her. We take lots of breaks and go for car rides. Sometimes I wait for her while she goes inside places and comes back with bags of Human food. Other times we go to the dog park and I play catch with my ball. Sometimes she gets a coffee mocha and I get a dog treat. I don't want to go to the shelter! When I came to live with my Human, Cleo didn't go to the shelter. But Merlynn seems like she knows things. Things Cleo didn't know. It's all so much to think about and I slink away from the door. I get into my zippy crate and my Human finds me there.

"Stormy," her face appears at the end of my crate. "Are you sick?"

I creep out and press very hard against her. "Don't take me to the shelter." I can't stop shaking.

## MERLYNN'S FIRST DAYS



**M**y Human pets my fur for a long time. "It's okay," she says in her soft, soothing voice. "Merlynn is going to live with us, just like Cleo. She is going to be our cat."

Merlynn. The cat's name is Merlynn, not Tattoo. My Human has given Merlynn a new name just like she gave me a new name when I came to live with her. She is not going to send me to the shelter because we have a new cat. Merlynn is wrong.

Merlynn stays in her room for seven sleeps. Every morning, my Human replaces Merlynn's food and water. After I eat, I try to get into the room to eat some of Merlynn's tasty sandbox treats. But my Human always sees me and stops me. She scoots me out the door with her foot. Sometimes my Human stays in Merlynn's room and glues, paints, and cuts things. Merlynn lies on the table while my Human works. Her long tail hangs over the edge and she swishes it back and forth. I sit down on my short and stubby tail so Merlynn

can't see I don't have a tail like hers. I whine at the door. I want to come inside and sniff Merlynn. But my Human won't open the door for me.

Sometimes I lie at the door and talk to Merlynn through the glass door windows. She tells me about her life before the shelter. She owned a male Human and went to a store every day. She lay on a counter and people pet her. She always drank water from the bathroom faucet. I can't imagine drinking water from the bathroom faucet. I drink water from my bowl, and my Human leaves me a cup of water on the bathroom floor.

One day, Merlynn went outside and when she came home, her Human was gone. She cried and cried at the door, but his smells were gone. He hadn't taken her with him. She tried to find food, but no one left anything for her. A neighbor found her sleeping on her deck and took her into the shelter. She was what the shelter called a stray. She stayed in a confinement crate for three days, waiting to see if her Human would claim her. No one claimed her.

"I was lucky," Merlynn said. "Our Human adopted me. No one thought I would go fast because I am five, and most people want to adopt kittens and young cats."

I wiggled. "That's our Human. She's like that!"

Merlynn's life sounds very hard and I feel sad for her.

"Humans leave us." Merlynn stares at me. "One day our Human might leave you."

"No," I shake. "I am going to be magnificent. I am in training. My Human will never leave me."

Merlynn swishes her tail at me. "No one would adopt you at the shelter. You don't have a tail."

I lie down and tuck my head between my paws. I whine a little.

After seven sleeps, my Human opens the door for Merlynn. Merlynn walks very slowly into the living room. She sniffs everything. I lie on the carpet and watch her. Cleo has taught me that Cats Rule and I should wait until they come to me.

Finally, Merlynn gets close to me. I hope she wants to play with me. I miss Cleo. I miss her waking me up in the early morning. I miss chasing her all over the house. I miss chasing her in the backyard.

But Merlynn does none of that. Even though we have been talking through the glass door, when I stand in play stance, she bats all her claws at me and hisses. It's not at all like Cleo's hisses. Cleo's hisses were playful and fun. Merlynn's are saucy and mean. I jump back. Maybe Merlynn should go back to the room with the door closed.

Merlynn wants to go outside like me, but my Human won't let her. I tell Merlynn about Cleo and the raccoons, but Merlynn still wants to go outside. She tries to sneak out when the Cleaning Human arrives with her buckets and mops. But the Cleaning Human stops her. Merlynn follows the Cleaning Human around the house and lies on all the tables. Her fur flies everywhere. The Cleaning Human brings Merlynn smelly food. Merlynn eats it right away and then lies on the dining room table like she's drunk.

Merlynn doesn't like her water bowl. She jumps onto the bathroom sink and sticks her head by the faucet and meows in the loudest meows I have ever heard until my Human turns on the water faucet. Sometimes she scratches the furni-

ture and gets yelled at. She lies on the big dining room table and jumps on the kitchen counter. She eats from the plates my Human leaves in the sink. I don't think Merlynn has learned manners. She needs to go to cat school like I go to dog school. Merlynn hisses at me when I tell her she should go to cat school. I eat a few of Merlynn's sandbox treats. They don't taste like Cleo's. I spit a few out. Merlynn gets in trouble when my Human finds them on the floor. My Human thinks Merlynn missed her sandbox. Merlynn swats at me. My Human yells at her. At night, my Human shuts the door to her bedroom. Merlynn is not allowed to sleep with us on my Human's bed.

The Cleaning Human likes Merlynn. But I'm not sure I do, and I'm not sure my Human does either.

## VELVET COAT



**M**y Human calls it "Grooming."  
"We are going to get a groom today," she says.

I don't know why she says "We." It's not "we"; it's "me."

I understand what happens with fur. I have very silky fur that grows a lot. To keep it out of my eyes, I need fur-cuts. My whole family got fur-cuts from the Breeder Human. They wore their fur in long skirts around their legs. Before I went to live with my Human, I got a fur-cut that showed off my tan eyebrows and tan paws. I looked magnificent.

My Breeder Human gave me the first fur-cut. I thought all Humans knew how to fur-cut. But my Human doesn't cut fur. She always takes me somewhere else.

On my first fur-cut, I was given a warm bath. It felt so nice to be scrubbed and washed with warm water. The Fur Cut Human spent a lot of time with me, talking to me and rubbing behind my ears. I loved the attention. She thought I

was magnificent and very handsome because of my brown and tan fur! I couldn't wait to see her again.

I saw her a couple more times, but then we went to a different Fur Cut Human.

The Human opens the door to the fur-cut shop and there is a lot of barking. There are seven dogs of all shapes and sizes who run around a small room. The room smells like shampoo and a lot of damp fur. Everyone has a tail, and I hope they don't notice mine is gone. My dog pals sniff my butt, but no one ever barks anything about my missing tail.

A tall white fluffy dog stands on a table. He isn't attached to anything to keep him on the table. The Fur Cut Human is at the sink with her back to him. Fluffy dog steps to the edge of the table and barks at all the other dogs. All the dogs, including me, bark.

There is a big basket of toys by the sink. I grab a stuffed toy friend and run around the room with it in my mouth. Two other dogs chase me. We dodge under the table and race around the Fur Cut Human's legs. This is a fun fur-cut!

My Human stands on the other side of a small gate. I smell worry on her.

"Bye-bye, Human," I wiggle at her as I dash by her with two other dogs on my chase. She doesn't look very happy, but I am really happy.

I spend a lot of the morning running around with my stuffed friend. When I am not in a game of chase, I chew on my stuffed friend's ear. I've gotten a good chunk bitten off and pieces lay on the floor. A different dog is on the table and we play another game of dodge around the table legs while this dog gets its fur trimmed. After a while, I get tired of the



chase and watch another dog push out the gate to the room where the Humans pick us up. I follow the dog with my stuffed friend. I spend time pulling out the stuffing and then lie down under the chair for a nap.

When I wake up, it is my turn. The Fur Cut Human pulls the flat stuffed friend from my mouth and lifts me onto the table. Her hands are rough, not smooth and soothing like the other Fur Cut Humans. She doesn't try to hold me on the table, but I stand very still. The other dogs play chase and sometimes the table moves. I concentrate on staying on the table. The floor looks a long way down. She doesn't rub my ears or tell me how magnificent I am. She spends a lot of time pulling and yanking at the fur under my chest. Something stings on my chest. I yelp. She lifts my floppy ears and wrinkles her nose. She doesn't put soft balls of fluff inside with soothing creams. She drops my ears and doesn't touch them again.

The Fur Cut Human shaves the fur short along my right back leg and my nerves prickle. She leaves the fur long in other places on my other legs. She doesn't use a brush to comb out my fur skirt. She picks at the fur with something sharp and leaves most of my fur skirt in long scraggly threads. I'm pretty sure I don't look magnificent.

Finally, she ties a piece of cloth around my neck. My other Fur Cut Human gave me a cloth too, and that's how I know I'm done. My Human thinks I look cute with the cloth necktie, but it bothers me and she lets me take it off by dinner time.

The Fur Cut Human lifts me off the table and I run around with another dog until I see my Human. I race

toward my Human and push my way out the gate to greet her. The stuffing from my flat stuffed friend still lies under the chair. I dance around my Human and show off my new fur-cut. My Human always squeals and says I look so nice, but today she is frowning at me. She has a conversation with the Fur Cut Human. My Human smells like anger.

While they are talking, I go get my flat stuffed friend. I want to take him home with me. I carry him in my mouth to my Human. My Human takes the flat stuffed friend from me and drops it on the ground. "No," she says in that firm voice.

My Human leads me out the door and places me in the car. "Never again, Stormy," she says.

Why is she angry? I had a good time except for the fur-cut.

That night I am very itchy.

"You have fleas," Merlynn says. "Stay away from me."

"Fleas? What are fleas?" I itch my stomach with my back paw.

"Itchy bugs." Merlynn leaps on the dining room table. She swishes her tail.

The next day, my Human takes me to the place where I get my shots. There are a lot of fear and anxiety smells everywhere.

The medicine Human places me on a tall table. It's taller than the Fur Cut Human's table. I shake, but she holds me around my middle. She lifts one ear and spritzes cold liquid inside. I squirm, but my Human holds me and I can't move away.

The medicine Human places some smelly liquid on my neck. I can't lick it off, but it doesn't hurt.

When we get home, Merlynn tells me I smell. But she gets the liquid on her neck too. She tries to lick it off, but she can't reach it either. Both of us walk around with wet, smelly necks until dinner.

After dinner, my Human tries to squirt the liquid in my ears, but she can't hold me and lift my ears at the same time. Most of the liquid ends up on the floor.

The next time I get a fur-cut, we go somewhere else.

# THE SPECIAL VEST



**T**he Human drives the car to my training school. I am a little tired. We've been to the dog park and I've chased the ball for a long time. We go to the dog park a lot before training school. When I am tired from running at the park, I can sit still longer while the Trainer Human talks to the Humans and teaches them about us. Humans must have a lot to learn about dogs because they get a lot of long talking sessions.

We enter the room with the inflatable castle and before I can try to pee on it, the Trainer Human pets me and says, "Stormy! You look so handsome."

I wiggle for her.

My Human smells happy and proud. I won't pee on the sandcastle today.

After the bad groom and my itchy bugs stop, my Human takes me to a different Fur Cut Human. I run around outside with a couple of other dogs and when it's my turn, I

am the only dog in the room. I get a bath and the Fur Cut Human spends a lot of time clipping and brushing my fur. She combs my bushy brown eyebrows and talks to me in a soft voice. She leaves a lot of brown fur on my paws, and the rest of me is silky and smooth. I am hot with my black fur, and this cut makes me feel cool. She lifts my ears and rubs soft cotton in them with a soothing lotion. When she finishes, she rubs behind my ears for a long time. I thank her with lots of wiggles. When the Fur Cut Human is done, she ties a cloth around my neck. My Human smells happy when she picks me up.

At training school, we sit in a big circle of Humans and young dogs. The Humans sit in chairs, and the dogs lie at their feet. My Human keeps her foot on my leash so I can't move away from her. The other dogs have their blankets and comfy beds. My Human can't bring her big bed to class for me to sleep in. My dog friends all sleep in dog beds at home. We don't tell them I sleep in the Human's bed.

I lay my head between my paws. The ground is hard, but I don't mind. There are lots of interesting smells in the room. Beside me, a Lab chews on a smelly rawhide bone. My Human doesn't let me have rawhide bones. I lick my lips and stare at the Lab. I really want a rawhide bone. I growl just a little and no one hears me, not even the Lab.

Finally, the talking stops. The Lab finishes his bone. My Human releases the pressure on my leash and I stand up. I wiggle. What game are we playing today? I like all the games we play except for the one where I lie with my belly toward the sky. We don't play that one very often. We always play the

game where we run into the center of the room and play with the other dogs. I still play the dance for my Human when she calls me, but she has gotten better at getting the leash on me, even if I don't quite come to her hand like the other dogs.

We also walk on our leashes in a circle. We have to walk very slow and it's a boring game. At home, my Human walks me down the driveway and we practice this game. But in our game at home, I charge ahead and pull on my leash. My Human stops every other step, but I still keep charging. We play that driveway walk on a leash game a lot. My Human smells frustrated, but I just want to run fast!

The Trainer Human walks over to me. She places a piece of cloth over my fur. It sits in the middle of my body. The Trainer Human reaches under me and her fingers tickle my stomach. I wiggle. "Hold still, Stormy," she says.

I stop wiggling and try to hold still as she fastens the fabric together. It doesn't hurt, but the clip feels funny against my tummy.

"You're a good dog," The Trainer Human pats my head.

The other dogs all wear a cloth too, and we walk in a slow circle around the room with our Humans. Everyone applauds. We are all magnificent!

"Time to go to work!" The Trainer Human says.

My Human places me in the car. I take a nap and wake up when she pulls into somewhere that is dark even though it is still daylight. My Human parks the car and places a small bag on the ground. When she lifts me out of the car, I sniff the bag. I am not sure where we are going. Is she taking me

someplace and leaving me? Are my stuffed friends in the bag? Am I at the shelter? I shake.

"Stormy!" My Human leans over and hugs me. I press against her. But I can't stop shaking. We've never been to this place before. There are big noises and smells all around us. I'm very scared and I'm even more scared that she is going to leave me here without her.

# THE MALL



"It's okay," my Human says in her soft voice. She hugs me close to her. "We are at the mall."  
The mall? What is a mall?

My Human tugs on my leash. "Come on."

I walk with my small non-existent tail tucked into my backend. I know I don't have a long tail and I still haven't figured out why. I feel like there is a tail but it's just not long like Cleo, Merlynn, and the other dogs. My Human and I walk on concrete and there are a lot of oil and gas smells. Sometimes a car pulls alongside us and my Human places me on her side, away from the car. It's still scary, even if it's not the shelter.

The noises and smells get even bigger as we walk into a large courtyard. Humans are walking everywhere. Some carry bags that brush against me as we walk by. We pass places with a lot of Human food smells. I pull on my leash toward the Human food, but my Human tugs me to her side. It's still our secret from the Trainer Human that I eat



Human food sometimes from the dish machine. The Human also shares her popcorn with me like Mom Human did at the beach. Afterward, I jump on the couch and dig pieces out of the cushions.

There are still a lot of food smells around me, but I also smell my dog friends. The dogs who are in my classes are here. I pull on my leash to my dog pals. They stand in a large group with their Humans. My Human is not leaving me. We are in another one of those classes where I play games with my dog pals!

I pull harder. My Human yanks me in the other direction. It's a fun game of tug of war with my leash!

"Don't yank him and create a tug away," The Trainer Human says. "When Stormy pulls on the leash, walk backward with him."

My Human takes two steps backward. There is nowhere else for me to go with the way she holds the leash. I follow her.

We do this little dance of backward and forward until we reach my dog friends. We all sniff noses and butts to greet each other.

When the dogs are done saying hello, the Humans sit at small tables. I stand beside my Human. I want to keep my eye on things. But she places her foot on my leash and I sit down. My Human hands me small pieces of my favorite treat.

After I finish my treat, we walk to where a door is opening and closing all on its own. I have never seen a door open and close without a Human.

My Human hands me a special treat as the doors swish

open in front of us. The Lab who didn't like the tunnels, balks and backs up and pulls on his leash. He won't go through the open door. My Human walks with me and continues to hand me treats. I trot beside her, through the open door, and sit next to her.

The doors swish close. There are glass windows instead of walls. I wiggle at my dog friends who are waiting outside. I am not scared. It's just like when Merlynn was in the room and we talked through the glass windows. And, most importantly, my Human is beside me.

The room starts moving, and I stand very still with all four paws planted on the floor. The floor isn't moving but the glass windows are moving, and we are going up, up, up. I don't howl or cry, and the doors open.

My Human tugs on my leash and I walk beside her. We are on concrete again.

"Good job!" The Trainer Human greets us. She pets me. "Stormy did well."

I stand very tall. I am magnificent. The Trainer Human never pets any of the dogs unless they are magnificent!

My Human walks me to a large staircase. At home, I can bound up the stairs when I am not on my leash and chasing Cleo. But sometimes the Human and I play the stair game. When I am on my leash walking with my Human, we take a step and stop. She says wait and I wait. Then we take another step and repeat the process up the stairs. I like this game, and she hands me a special treat at the top of the stairs.

At the top of these stairs, the Trainer Human praises me again. I am magnificent! I like the mall.

My Human walks me down a long sidewalk. She places

me so I walk against the concrete wall. The wall makes me walk very slowly and I can't see around her legs. We stop outside a door and I wait. When my Human motions for me to walk with her inside, I sniff. The whole place smells like where my Human takes her poops and baths. I don't see anywhere for the Human to poop, but there is a tiny bathtub. I lift my leg to make a mark so my Human will know she can take a bath here, but my Human pushes me away from the small tub before I can leak any pee.

The small tub is filled with toys! I lean my head inside to grab one.

"No, Stormy!" My Human jerks my leash and we move away from the toys.

In the store, my Human spends a long time sniffing everything, just like me!

When she is finished sniffing, my Human carries her bag of smelly things beside her leg and I try not to bump into the bag. Its smells are too much for me! She guides me down the sidewalk and into a room where there are a lot of little Humans.

I am so excited. I love little Humans! I wiggle and wiggle. One of the little Humans kneels beside me.

"Ohhh!" she says in a very high-pitched squeal.

Her voice makes me wiggle even more.

My Human sits down and places a treat beside her. I sit on the soft rug and eat the treat. She taps the ground and I move into a down. I stretch out my paws and give her my best I love you look. I get two treats.

A small Human sits down beside us. I hope she will squeal and play with me. But she begins talking and flipping

pages of a book. My Human reads a lot of books, but she never asks me to sit beside her on the floor.

It's boring listening to the small Human talk and talk and talk. She holds the book to my nose. I sniff. It doesn't smell like much to me. She continues talking and talking and talking. I get tired and rest my paws between my head.

When she is finished, another small Human takes her place and she does the same thing. She talks and talks and talks and talks. I close my eyes. The talking seems to go on forever and finally I hear my Human saying, "Stormy. Let's go outside."

I open my eyes and stand up. I give a big shake. I shake-off all that talking at me. I don't know what is wrong with the small Humans. I want to play with them and all they want to do is talk to me with the books.

My Human leads me to a grassy place. I take a long pee. When I am finished peeing, I do another shake-off. I hope we don't have to go back into the room for more talking with the little Humans.

My Human steers me toward the room, and I pull a little at the door. "Please," I beg her with my eyes. "Let's go explore the good smells."

But she doesn't understand and tugs firmly at my leash. I follow her into the room and we return to the carpet.

This time, a small Human boy sits in front of me. He smells different than the other small Humans. He smells like fear and anxiety. I roll over on my side so my belly is exposed. He giggles and pets me. The smell of fear goes away. I roll back over and move closer to him on my belly. I raise my

head to meet his and lick his face. He giggles even more and the smell of anxiety is gone.

The Human boy flips the pages and talks slow. He stops a lot and my Human inserts words for him. I sit very still and close to him. Sometimes he moves his hand over my fur, but the smell of anxiety and fear never comes back.

When he is finished, I give him one more lick on the cheek. He giggles and I wiggle.

The boy hugs me close to him and I lick his face.

The boy smells like joy.

## RAINY DAYS



**T**he rainy dark days arrive. Big leaves fall on our deck until I can't see the deck. I hold the leaves in my mouth and dash up and down the deck. Merlynn watches me from the glass windows of the door. When my Human opens the door to let me in, Merlynn tries to get out. I block her and growl.

"Good dog, Stormy," my Human says. I get two treats today. My Human doesn't mind that a few of those wet leaves have come inside with me.

"Out," Merlynn meows.

My Human shakes her head. "No."

Merlynn meows louder. "Out."

"No, Merlynn." My Human's voice is sharp. I smell irritation.

"The next time you go out," Merlynn slips past me, "step aside and I can go out."

"No." I bark at her. "You can't go out. Bad things happen

to cats." I still miss my friend Cleo. She was more fun than Merlynn.

Merlynn hisses at me. I step out of her way so she can't swipe my ears.

"Merlynn!" My Human says, her voice loud and firm. "Do not hiss at Stormy."

"You might go back to the shelter," I say. "No one will want to adopt you."

Merlynn hisses and stalks to the dining room. She hops onto the table and eyes me from her perch. My Human doesn't shoo her off. I guess she doesn't want to deal with Merlyn's claws either.

At night, I hop onto the bed with my Human. The loud machine in Merlynn's sandbox closet comes on a lot now. But it doesn't bother me. I am upstairs with my Human. I make a small nest out of the bed blankets. Some nights I sleep with my head on the pillow next to my Human. It's so nice she has a pillow just for me. Merlynn doesn't sleep on the bed like Cleo. My Human leaves the bedroom door open, but she never sleeps with us. Sometimes I hear Merlynn scratching on the front door to go out.

In the morning, I wake up and leap out of bed. I do my happy dance around the bed and grab my Human's slipper. She opens her eyes and smiles at me. But this morning is different. She is not opening her eyes. She grumbles something at me.

I don't understand. The morning light is coming up. Why doesn't she want to get up? It takes a long time to get her up this morning and the light is bright. We have slept too long!

During the day, I bark at the dogs who live behind me, go for errands with my Human, and play ball at the dog park in the wet mud. But at dinner time, I wait for my food and she doesn't give it to me. I stand by my bowl and bark so my Human will know it's time to feed me. But she shakes her head. "It's daylight savings time," she says. "We fall back so it's an hour later. Dinner isn't for another hour."

I don't understand what she is saying.

I smell Merlynn's poops and hear her scratching in her sandbox. Merlynn's poops are hard and taste crusty. Merlynn gets different food than Cleo. She gets smelly soft food in a can sometimes. I think the canned food makes her poops not taste as good as Cleo's poops.

"Why isn't my dinner coming now?" I ask Merlynn.

"The Humans play with the clocks," Merlynn sits down by the door to her sandbox room. She licks one paw and cleans herself. "I don't notice it myself, but my food is out all day. You will now get dinner an hour later. Your food in the morning will be an hour later too."

"No," I whine and shake my head. My ears flop around my face. "I can't do that. I have a schedule."

Merlynn licks her other paw. "You don't have a choice," she says. "It's just the way it is."

Merlynn is right and my dinner is ready for me an hour later. My Human acts like nothing is different and scoops the morsels out of the bag and places my bowl in front of me.

I eat as if I am starving, and I am! An hour late for dinner and my stomach is turning in hunger knots!

The next morning, it is the same ritual. I bound out of bed, but my Human doesn't get up. I place my paws on the



bed and whine. She ignores me. I sink to the floor and stare at her until she gets up.

After breakfast, we drive to the dog park. The grass is tall and wet. The rain falls, but my Human keeps throwing the ball. I am the only dog at the park and it's so much fun.

My Human finally stops throwing the ball and we walk to the car. I am a little bit tired, and I walk beside my Human. Leash walking is something my Human and I are still working on. I like to get places and I pull and tug on the leash. My Human can't keep up because I pull and tug so hard. But once we turn around to come back, I walk beside her and let the leash drop in a large loose loop. It's a fun leash game. The Trainer Human doesn't like my leash game.

At the car, my Human rubs the rain from my fur with my towel. The towel on my fur makes me feel itchy and I squirm away from her. I dart back to her and grab the towel. I pull and growl. My Human snaps the towel away from me and mutters something about my wet fur. I give myself a good shake and water flies everywhere.

My Human pats the back seat of the car and I leap inside. I sink onto a dry towel on the back seat and settle in for a nap. My Human attaches my leash to the back seat so I can't fall off. We are either going to run Human errands or go to more dog school lessons. I will be in the car for a while and I'm ready for a nap.

But before I get too deep into my nap, the car comes to a stop.

My Human turns to me. "Stormy," she says. "We're here."

# MY HUMAN NEEDS ME



I stand on my hind legs and peer out the window. My paw and nose prints cover the window. Sometimes my Human wipes them off, but I make sure my paw and nose prints come back. It's my window.

I don't recognize the building, but my dog pals and their Humans are here.

My Human opens the back door. "Come on, Stormy." She motions her hand for me to jump out. I am big and she doesn't have to lift me out anymore. But I always wait until she says my name and signals for me to jump out.

I smell my Human's anxiety. When we go to training classes, the Human doesn't smell like anxiety. Most of the time she smells like fun and love. I lean against her leg. "I will be with you. You are my pack." Sometimes at night, I press against her and say the same thing. In her sleep, she leans against me and I snuggle with her.

But we are not snuggling now. She doesn't even pet me.

My Human pulls my brush out of her bag. I hate my brush and start to pull and yank hard on the leash.

"Stop it, Stormy." She brushes my back. The bristles are sharp and poke me. I squirm away from her.

The Human grabs me around the middle and holds me against her. She brushes my paws, legs, and belly. I yowl and twist away from her.

My Human doesn't brush me like the Fur Cut Human. The Fur Cut Human's brush tickles and is soft. My brush is sharp and pokes me. I don't like to be poked.

My Human's anxiety is stronger as we approach the building. I don't smell anxiety in the other Humans. My Human leans down and places the vest on me. I stand very still as she clips the underside. When she clips on the vest, we are a working team.

Once the vest is on, I stand very tall and straight. I don't move or wiggle. I am a magnificent working dog.

But the strong smell of anxiety is still coming from my Human. I lean against her. My first job is to take care of her, no matter where we are.

We stand beside one of my favorite dog pals, a big goofy black Lab. He sniffs me and I wiggle. Both the Humans pull us away. This is not a time for play. We are working.

My Human and I follow the other dogs and humans inside a large building. It smells like a lot of chlorine. The floor is very slippery, and I have to concentrate on not slipping. At home, the Cleaning Human makes our floors slippery. She sprays the floors and uses her mop. I growl and bark at the mop. If I run too fast, I slide on the floors. Some-

times my paws fly out from under me and I slide across the floor on my belly. Merlynn lies on the table and smirks at me. She never slides on the floors.

We walk past a mop. It is much bigger than ours. I growl, just a little. No one hears me. Humans are everywhere. Some walk with sticks. Others sit in chairs with wheels. I want to sniff the wheels for treats. We play a game in our training classes. Humans sit in chairs and hide treats on the wheels. The Humans applaud when we find the treats and give us more. I want to sniff the wheels for treats, but my Human keeps my leash tight so I have to walk beside her.

We walk into a big room, and Humans are sitting in a circle. They smell like wisdom and experience. These are Humans who have lived a lot of years. My grandma smelled like these Humans. She lived with us when I lived with my littermates, but my grandma didn't do a lot of agility. She spent a lot of time lying on the couch. I hope I can spend a lot of time lying on the couch when I smell like wisdom and experiences.

All my dog pals and their Humans line up. We walk around the circle of wise Humans. We stop in front of every Human in the circle. We get a lot of pets. I think it's fun and wiggle for everyone. This is much better than sitting with the little Humans who talk at us and flip pages.

But as we walk around the circle, my Human still smells sad.

One wise Human tells us she had a dog like me. A car hit her dog.

I hope a car never hits me. My Human and I practice a fast recall in our classes. I run away from my Human. When

I am far enough away, she calls to me in a very high-pitched voice. I learn to stop running and immediately come to her. We practice this over and over until I come to her on the first call of my name. This is a serious game, and I don't try to make up my own rules.

My Human and I walk around the circle of wise Humans.

"He has slippers!" A wise Human in a chair points to my feet.

I like slippers. I chewed up a couple of pairs that belong to my Human. She doesn't get too mad at me, and new slippers appear for me to chew.

But I don't have slippers. I have tan paws. I haven't been to see the Fur Cut Human recently and my fur fans around my legs. It looks like I have really large paws. Not slippers.

We walk to the next wise Human in a chair. This human doesn't want to pet me. She keeps her eyes closed. I can smell illness. I look up at my Human and she has water in her eyes. She leans to pet me and I lick away the eye water. It tastes salty and sad. The wise Humans in chairs and who walk with sticks make my Human sad. They remind her of Humans she once knew who are no longer here. I see those Humans sometimes. They visit her and watch over her. Just like Cleo. I can see the Humans who once knew my Human around us. Sometimes I bark to let my Human know they are visiting, but my Human can't see them as I do and she doesn't understand my bark.

We get to the end of the circle of Humans and walk outside.

The Trainer Human says, "You did so well today, Stormy. You should come back again."

I lean against my Human. I look into my Human's eyes. "I love you. I am here for you. We don't have to return here."

## THE MAN IN THE SUIT



**M**y Human drags boxes inside the house from the garage. I have fun barking at her from the door. When she is finished with the boxes, she unzips a large bag and pulls out tree branches. I sniff. The branches aren't real! I want to leave my pee mark, but she tells me "No, Stormy" in her firm voice. At least she doesn't get out the smelly spray like the Trainer Human when I try to pee on the floppy sandcastle.

Merlynn sniffs the tree branches. When she gets too close, I growl at her. These are my tree branches! Merlynn dashes off to the stairs and then returns. Even Merlynn likes the game of pretend branches.

My Human moves the branches to form a tree. A tall metal pole holds the branches. Real trees do not have metal poles. I sniff and try to leave my pee mark. "No, Stormy," my Human says.

I wiggle and bark. This is a fun game!

My Human opens the boxes and pulls out dangling

things. She hangs them on the branches. I sniff everything and try to eat the ones on the lower branches. Merlynn bats at the dangling things and makes a couple fall to the ground. I put them in my mouth. My Human opens my jaw and makes me spit them out. She moves all the low-hanging things up higher so we can't get them.

I'm pretty sure Merlynn could climb the tree. In the backyard, she climbs over the fence. But instead of jumping, she curls up underneath the fake tree and takes a long nap on a thick blanket. I lie on the couch and stare at the hanging things. Some blink and twirl.

That afternoon, my Human and I get in the car. It's been very rainy and we haven't been to the dog park for a few days. I hope we are going to the dog park. But my Human drives past the park. I whine a little and press my nose against my window. The dog park is empty and whishes by fast.

When the car stops, my Human motions for me to get out. I hop to the ground and walk to a whooshing door with her. I smell fear, sadness, and panic.

My Human smells like joy. "You are going to meet Santa!"

I don't know who Santa is, but he must be scary because there are so many dog fear smells.

When we get inside, the smell of dog sadness and fear is stronger. There are other animals with their Humans. We sniff each other's butts and everyone smells like joy.

But I know there are other animals in this place. I smell them everywhere. There are cats and dog smells of all sizes and breeds. Dogs bark from behind closed doors in loud barks.



"This is where Merlynn came from," my Human tells me.

I sit down beside my Human. I lean into her legs and shake. I am at the shelter. What did I do wrong? I've been very good at all the training places. I haven't had any accidents in the house. I sleep curled up next to my Human. I am her pack. But we are at the shelter and those smells are all the dogs and cats that someone didn't want. In minutes, I will be taken away to that same place and my name Stormy will not be my name anymore. I can't stand it. I try to crawl under the bench and between my Human's legs. I am shaking so much I can't breathe.

"Stormy?" A Human stands at a door with a clipboard. She motions toward my Human and me.

This is it. I'm going into the shelter and my Human is going to leave me.

"Come on, Stormy," my Human says in her cheery voice.

I place my paws on the ground and try to dig in. But the ground is a slippery floor and I can't get any traction. I slide along the floor as my Human pulls on my leash.

The Human at the door laughs. "Look at the dog with slippers. He slides."

"Please take me home," I whine to my Human. "Don't leave me."

My Human picks me up and places me inside the room. "This will be fun, Stormy." Her voice is light and happy. She shuts the door behind us. She does not take off my leash or leave me.

A fake tree is in the room, just like ours at home. In front of the tree, a man holds out a treat. "Come here, Stormy."

The treat smells really good.

My Human walks with me toward the man with the treat.

When I get close to the man with the treat, I stop.

The man is wearing a big beard and it is scary.

Scary.

I back away from the man and slip on the floor. My Human is right behind me and pushes me forward with her foot placed alongside my butt.

"No," I whine. "I don't want the treat."

My Human keeps her foot against me until I am face to face with the man with the beard. I snatch the treat and dance away. I know this move well from my training classes. He can't get me!

But my Human also knows my trick. She scoops me up and places me on the man with the beard's lap.

No. No. No.

I squirm. I wiggle. I do not want to be anywhere close to the man with the beard. He wraps his arms around me. It does not feel like a hug. It feels like he is going to take me to a cage with all the other dogs. I will bark and bark and bark and no one will come to get me.

My Human stands behind a Human with a small machine. "Stormy!" My Human squeaks a round toy. I look up and the small machine snaps.

I squirm. I want to be back on the floor. This is the worst day I've ever had.

The small machine snaps more.

I keep squirming.

I smell Santa's irritation. He wants to push me off his lap.

I dig my nails into his leg.

Suddenly, I fly off his lap and onto the floor. I skid on my stomach. No one is going to catch me now. I run around the room in a mad dash with my leash dragging behind me. I go under the table and slink very low. No one is going to get me under this table.

"Time to go, Stormy." My Human squats under the table with me. She is good with getting into small spaces with me after our tunnel practices. She grabs my leash and leads me outside.

I shake a big shake-off. My ears flap and my fur flies. But it's not enough to get rid of my fear. I shake another shake-off. I shake so hard my jaw makes sounds. Brrr...brrrr...

My Human leads me to the car. But I am too tired to jump up to the seat. She places me on my soft towel and ties my leash to the back seat headrest.

I collapse on my towel. I am so glad to be away from the man with the beard! I am not going to be left at the shelter!

My Human grins at me. She ruffles my fur. She is not tired at all and smells very happy. My Human holds a paper to my face. It's me on the paper. I am squirming on the man with the beard's lap. My eyes plead at her. I hope she doesn't frame this picture for our empty wall! This is a horrible picture of me!

I never want to do this day again.

But we will do this day EVERY YEAR for as long as I live! The Human tells me it's for the animals who don't have

homes like Merlynn. She says we are helping them by giving them money for food.

There must be other ways to help the animals without homes. Maybe we could adopt a few of them like Merlynn. When I tell Merlynn, she hisses at me. "I don't want another cat to live here."

Every year my Human sets up the fake tree, and my pictures with Santa will be placed on the mantel. Eventually there are so many, some will have to be tucked behind others. In every picture, I am always squirming. I am not magnificent in the Santa pictures! I am miserable!

## THE STUFFED FRIEND



A lot of boxes and bags are placed under the fake tree. When my Human is not watching, I pull out the tissue paper and chew it into small pieces.

Merlynn prances by me, headed for her nap spot under the tree. "You shouldn't do that," she says. "The Human isn't going to like it." Her tail flicks across my face and tickles my nose.

But when my Human finds the torn tissue paper, she sits down on the carpet in front of the tree. She pats the spot next to her. I wiggle up to her and flop down beside her. She pets me, and I press against her leg.

My Human reaches for a bag in the back of the tree. It's tucked behind a chair and I didn't see it. She hands the bag to me. I yank the tissue paper out of the bag. It's such a fun game. When the tissue paper lies in pieces around me, I sniff inside the bag.

A stuffed friend!

I have lots of stuffed friends. They all sleep in my basket

by the couch. Humans like to bring stuffed friends to me. After they leave, I tear them apart. My favorite part of stuffed friends is the stuffing. I don't eat the stuffing. I just pull it out all over the living room. Merlynn doesn't like this game, even though I try to get her interested. I lay the stuffed friends on the carpet in front of her and wait for her to rip into them with her claw paws. But she never does. She sniffs them and walks away. Her tail is high in the air, twitching back and forth.

Merlynn doesn't have a basket of toys like me. No one brings her anything except the Cleaning Human, who gives her food from a can. I have toys that are big circles and hard to chew. I have toys that get stuffed with peanut butter. But my favorite are my stuffed friend toys that all become flat friends.

Merylnn has one toy, a little toy mouse that she bats around the floor. Sometimes, after she is done playing with her mouse and leaves to take a nap, I find the mouse and try to eat it. My Human always takes it away from me. "That belongs to Merlynn," she says.

I know it belongs to Merlynn, but she should share it with me. I share my toys with Merlynn.

I yank my new stuffed friend out of the tissue paper.

It is bigger than my other stuffed friend toys.

"Santa!" My Human says when I pull it away from the bag.

"Santa?" Santa who I saw with a beard? Santa at the shelter? Santa is my stuffed friend? I want to tear this Santa apart!

I chew on Santa's leg, but he's made of tough material

and I can't make a hole. I try his arm, but it's the same material.

I carry Santa around for the next three sleeps. I try to tear a hole to get at the stuffing and can get a little bit of a hole started. But I can't pull out his stuffing. Santa is not like my other stuffed friends who come apart easily.

But Santa is my favorite stuffed friend. I don't want to leave him and he goes everywhere with me. He travels into the yard, the car, and down the driveway on walks. My Human makes a special blanket for me out of soft material. She places the blanket in the car when we go on long car rides. She spreads the blanket across the couch so I can sleep on it. When we go places and take my food for overnight trips, she brings the blanket and lays it across the beds for me.

My stuffed friend Santa is always with me.

Over the years, I have many stuffed friends who I make flat. My teeth make holes in Santa, and I tear more and more of Santa apart. Finally, he becomes flat Santa and is as worn as my special blanket.

My Human never tries to replace my blanket or flat Santa.

# THE THROAT MONSTER



Something is in my throat. My Human and I are at the place with the sand where I chase my ball. Mom Human is not with us, and we are staying at a different place. Underneath us, people are walking around and talking. I bark at them. But something is wrong with my bark. The Monster in My Throat talks instead of my bark.

The first night, I can't sleep. Every time I close my eyes, the Monster in My Throat starts talking to me. I don't want to lie on the bed with my Human. I jump down and try to get comfortable on the floor.

But the Monster in My Throat talks loud. I can't believe I am making this much noise. It sounds like two dogs at least.

"Stormy!" My Human jumps out of bed. "Do you have something stuck in your throat? Did your bone get caught in your throat?"

I haven't touched my special rawhide bone. The chewing makes the Monster in My Throat hurt.



The Monster in My Throat makes loud noises.

My Human paces the floor. I smell worry and fear.

Every time I lie down, the Monster in My Throat talks.

After a lot of the Monster in My Throat talking very loudly, my Human picks me up and opens the door. She carries me down the stairs and places me in the car on my towel in the back seat. She does not have her shoes on, and she is wearing her sleeping clothes.

"I'm sorry." She gives me a very sad look. "You have to sleep here. Your cough is very noisy. People are staying below us. We have to be quiet at night."

I am not scared in the car. It smells like my Human. I pretend I am waiting for her to come back from errands, and I lie down. But the Monster in My Throat keeps me awake. It is a very long night, and I get a little shivery.

Early in the morning, when the light has barely come up, my Human is back at the car. This time she is dressed in her going-somewhere clothes and shoes. She opens the back door and buckles me into the seat with my leash. She pats my head and kisses me. I smell the worry and fear. It's stronger this morning.

I don't feel bad, but the Monster in My Throat keeps making that loud noise. My stomach growls, but I don't get breakfast in the car.

My Human drives us to a place that smells like the place where I get shots.

She lifts me out of the car, and the Monster in my Throat makes loud noises.

She brings me into a room with other dogs. The Monster in my Throat keeps talking. We are escorted out of

the room quickly, and she places me back in the car. She leaves me there but only for a quick minute. When she reappears, we go into a different door than the one we came in and sit down in a room that smells like fear and sickness. I pull on the leash. I want to get out of here. Now.

The Monster in my Throat makes a loud noise.

The door opens and I try to escape, but a tall Medicine Human blocks my path. She pets me with a soft hand. I press against her.

"Can you make the Monster in My Throat go away?" I give her my best pleading look.

The Humans talk while I am prodded and poked. The Medicine Human places a stick in my back end, but the Monster in My Throat is talking so loudly I barely notice. I am busy trying to get the Monster in My Throat out!

The Medicine Human places me on the floor with two cookies. I haven't had breakfast and the cookies are gone in seconds.

The Medicine Human returns and gives me a big special soft treat.

She hands my Human a bottle and we go back out the door we came in. The Human puts me in the car with a couple of my treats. I can barely eat them because the Monster in My Throat talks so much.

But I don't smell fear on my Human.

"Kennel cough," she says. "Even though we get a shot. There are some kinds of strands that you can still catch."

I wiggle and wag. The Monster in My Throat is silent. My Human drives back to the sand, but I don't get to run

after my ball. She takes me on a short walk and places me back in the car. I am very sleepy.

My Human takes me back to the place where we are staying. She sets up my special blankets on the couch and I lie down. I close my eyes, and this time the Monster in My Throat doesn't bother me and I sleep.

When I wake up, I get my breakfast! But there is something else in my breakfast. It smells funny and I eat around it.

My Human scoops up the smelly thing in my bowl and hands me a big piece of cheese. I sniff. The smelly thing is inside the cheese. I eat the cheese but spit out the smelly thing.

"No, Stormy!" My Human places another smelly thing in her palm.

I wait for her to give it to me in cheese so I can spit it out again.

But this time she holds my neck and lifts my snout to the sky. She opens my jaw and rubs my neck. I gulp and the smelly thing goes down my throat. She hands me the cheese and I chew away the bitter taste in my mouth.

We repeat this smelly-thing routine three more times during the day. Each time, she gives me a piece of cheese and I spit out the bitter-tasting thing. After I spit it out, she holds me around the middle, opens my jaw, and drops the smelly thing into my mouth.

After one sleep, the Monster in My Throat is gone. And I have learned smelly bitter things come wrapped in cheese.

# HORSES



**A**fter we return home from the beach, I spend a few days trying to tell Merlynn about the big beach sandbox. But she tells me cats don't go to big sandboxes with water.

My Human and I begin a new series of training classes. She says we are getting closer to my big test day. I wiggle at her. I am going to be magnificent on the big test day!

On our way to training classes, we pass a big smelly animal.

"Bark. Bark. Bark." I stand on my hind legs, place my paws on the car window and bark at a cluster of huge, tall animals who are eating grass.

"Horses." My Human eyes me in the mirror she uses where she can keep facing forward to drive and, at the same time, see me in the back seat.

The horses are much bigger than any of my dog friends, and they smell. They smell so bad it floats through the closed

car windows. They smell like manure, gritty things, and nastiness.

"Bark. Bark. Bark."

"Stormy!" My Human says in that voice she uses when she is not happy with me.

I am protecting her!

"Bark. Bark. Bark." I keep barking even after we are past the horses.

My Human sighs and I smell frustration. What is her problem? I am keeping us safe! The horses didn't follow the car. I know it was because of my bark!

I whine and paw at the door as my Human drives over gravel. I love when I hear crunchy under the car tires. We are going to either the park with all the dogs where I play chase my ball or the training place with my dog pals where I get lots of treats and try to teach my Human how to communicate with me. She is a slow learner because we keep going back to the training place.

My Human parks the car and gets out. She opens the back door and unlatches my leash from the back seat headrest. I jump down but I don't get to go very far. She holds the leash tight, and I smell the gritty, nastiness smell again.

"Bark. Bark. Bark."

My Human smells frustrated again. "Stormy! Stop barking!"

"Bark, bark!" I twist on the leash. The horses are near. I can't see them, but they are close. I smell them!

My Human walks me into the big room with my dog pals and their Humans. The Humans are in the chairs, and

dogs sit on the floor in front of them. Most of the dogs have soft blankets and cozy beds. My Human doesn't bring a fancy soft blanket like the other Humans, and she can't bring my bed because it's her bed! But she brings my towel from the car. Sometimes I move the towel out of the way and sit on the floor. I like the slippery, cold floor underneath me.

The Trainer Human talks to the Humans. She stands in the middle of the circle. This part always gets a little boring and long. Some of my dog pals chew on rawhides, others lie on the floor in their soft beds. I keep my eye out for the castle. But the castle isn't here anymore.

Suddenly, I smell something. Something big and scary and bad.

I stand up.

My Human steps on my leash. But I am not sitting down, even if the collar starts to cut into my skin. I am not sitting down.

At the door, a little Human leads a small horse into the room. That animal does not belong in this room!

"Bark, bark, bark. Go away," I tell the horse. "This room is for dogs only!"

Some of my other dog pals stand up. "Bark. Bark. Bark."

The room is filled with dogs barking. I am leading the pack of barks.

The small Human leads the horse around the circle. My dog pals get treats when the horse gets near them, and they stop barking. Not me. The closer the horse gets to us, the louder I bark. I am not stopping now. The horse is coming to attack us. Danger. Danger. Danger.

Suddenly, I am jerked away from the horse. My feet fly out from under me and I slide on my belly, away from my dog pals.

The leash slackens, and I right myself onto my four paws and tug on the leash.

Bark. Bark. Bark.

My Human tugs the leash in a hard pull and I follow her out the door.

Once my paws hit the grass, I stop barking. The threat is gone. I wiggle. "Aren't you proud of me?"

I wiggle at my Human. I am a magnificent protector! I have gotten us outside, away from the smelly horse.

My Human sighs and leads me to the grassy place where all the dogs do their business. She isn't paying attention to me and I find a big squishy treat that tastes a lot better than Merlynn's cat treats. I eat it and keep sniffing along the fence.

When I am finished sniffing, my Human leads me back inside to my dog pals. I trot beside her. I can't wait to tell my dog friends! I have found a fabulous reward for barking at horses!

The small Human and horse are gone and my dog pals run around in the middle of the room. My Human takes my leash off, and I join my dog pals, sniffing the remaining smells of the horse still lingering on the floor.

I tell my dog pals about the special treats I found in the yard and my dog pals tell me that's the horse's poop. He left some in the room, but no one got to eat it. The Trainer Human cleaned it up. My dog pals tell me how lucky I am to have gotten to eat horse poop.

I am a magnificent King of the Dog Class! I ate horse  
poop!

Bark. Bark. Bark.



# THE FIRE STATION



**T**he Cleaning Human swishes her mop on the floor. I growl at the mop and slide on my belly. The floor is slippery and I land against the table leg.

Merlynn's tail swishes over the side. "You're in the way of the Cleaning Human."

"So are you." I plop onto my belly and sniff for crumbs under the table.

The Cleaning Human finishes with the mop and moves a rag across the table. She tries to clean around Merlynn, but Merlynn hisses at her.

"Merlynn!" My Human claps her hands. "Don't hiss!"

Merlynn hisses at my Human.

I wag and wiggle and bark.

"Merlynn and Stormy!" My Human pushes Merlynn off the table and motions for me to follow her.

I trot after her and am rewarded with a treat.

Merlynn doesn't get anything.

My Human leaves us in the room with the couch I'm not supposed to jump on.

I wait until she leaves the room and then jump on the couch. Merlynn hops onto the small table by the couch and stretches herself across it.

I curl against a couch pillow and rest my head on the armrest. I stare at the big wall by the stairs. There aren't any pictures on the wall.

"The Human doesn't have any pictures of me," I tell Merlynn. "She put away the Santa picture of me."

Merlynn swishes her tail. "I don't have any pictures either."

"My family had pictures," I say. "Lots of pictures of them winning ribbons and jumping through hoops and tunnels."

I lay my head between my paws. I feel sad. There should be pictures of me.

When the Cleaning Human leaves, Merlynn hops back onto the eating table. She leaves her black fur on the shiny table.

"Stormy!" My Human calls for me in that bright voice she uses when we are going somewhere in the car. She ignores Merlynn on the table.

I jump off the couch and run to her. My Human doesn't scold me for sleeping on the couch. She clips the leash to my collar and picks up my special training bag.

The drive doesn't take very long and when I get out, all my dog pals are waiting by a big vehicle with very large shiny wheels. I am really excited, but my Human has my favorite string cheese in her hand, and I sit and wait for her to give me

some. When I am finished, we walk across concrete that is slippery under my paws.

My Human places string cheese on the wheels. They smell like the treats from other dogs, but I only see the string cheese. I gobble it up and wait for more to be placed on the big shiny wheels. This is a fun game.

The floor is smooth and slippery under my feet, and there are lots of vehicle smells with some cleaning smells.

Another treat appears on the shiny wheels. I take it at the same time as I see another dog in the silver wheels. I stare at it. Who is that other dog?

I tilt my head.

I don't smell any other dogs beside me. My dog pals are sniffing other vehicles with shiny wheels, but a dog with long floppy ears is looking back at me from the wheel. I turn around and the dog turns around. I sit and the dog sits. It's like the window in my Human's bedroom where I lie on the bed. At night, I can see another dog lying on the bed with my Human. I know there are not two dogs lying on my Human's bed at night. I know there are not two dogs sitting beside the wheel and eating string cheese. There is just me.

The Human tugs on my leash. "Stormy," she says in that enticing voice that I would follow anywhere. I trot beside her and we stand in a line with my other dog pals and their Humans.

I smell nervousness on my Human, but before I can step closer to her to reassure her, a loud howling siren noise fills the air. I tilt my head and howl. I howl and howl. I am singing with the noise. We are one together. No other fur pal is howling. It's just me, with my head tilted in the air and

singing the loudest howl I can to match the noise. It's a big chorus of a song all for me. I howl even louder.

My Human waves string cheese in front of my nose.

But I am not interested in string cheese. I just want to howl, louder and louder and louder.

And then the singing noise stops, and I stop.

I wiggle and look at the Human. I am a good singer. I deserve many treats!

The Human eyes me with a funny look. I have never seen that look before. I don't think she's mad at me, but I don't think she's happy either. I wiggle and wiggle.

My Human leads me away from the shiny wheels and toward a man wearing a big suit of clothes. He holds out his hand with a meat-smelling treat. His hand is covered in a glove, but he's not scary like Santa with the beard. I step closer and sniff his hand. It smells like fire. But I am not scared. This man protects Humans. I scarf the treat and everyone applauds. I am magnificent!

The Trainer Human motions for me to stand in front of the large vehicle with the shiny wheels. My Human drops my leash and I stay in a strong sit in front of the wheel while the other Humans take my picture. There are a lot of Humans taking my picture! I am so happy to have my picture taken. I am a star for my howling! My Human can frame these pictures! I will have a wall of pictures with me singing the howling song.

I bark and howl.

Everyone laughs and applauds.

I am a star!

## MEETING MAMA



**M**y Human places the special cloth around me. When she ties the ribbons under my chest, it tickles and my back leg shoots out. My Human laughs. I like to hear her laugh and jerk my leg out behind me again. She lifts me out of the car and hamburgers, hotdogs, and sweet smells fill the air. Humans and little Humans are everywhere. I pull a little at the leash, even though I know I shouldn't. But the smells are exciting and my Human is slow.

We step inside a shaded grassy area with a table, and the Trainer Human greets me. I sit for her, and she gives me one of her special treats.

"Stormy is such a good boy," she says and pats my head.

I am magnificent!

There is another dog cowering by the table, and she smells anxious. Sometimes at the dog park, some dogs smell like this dog. The dogs are scared. They have been hurt by other dogs or, sometimes, Humans.

This dog smells of hurt dog. Sometimes dogs that smell

of dog hurt snap at me. My long ears get in the way of their teeth and little bits of fur fly everywhere. I don't want to get hurt and sniff under the table, far away from the other dog. There are some large poles and I lift my leg to pee on them. The Trainer Human "tsks" at me and lifts her spray bottle. I put my leg down and wander back under the table where a morsel of food has landed. It's a tasty cheese treat and I scarf it up.

Humans of all sizes and some dogs walk up to the table. Sometimes I try to slip under the table on my belly across the grass and sniff their shoes, but my Human yanks on my leash so I can't go very far. It's frustrating, and I slither from under the table and stand with her. I greet the dogs, and the Humans talk. One dog lunges at me and growls. I am scared. I whine and step back to hide behind my Human's legs. The owner yanks the dog away from the table. I get a lot of treats after that dog leaves.

After what seems like a lot of greeting different dogs, my Human steps away from the table and we walk to a big grassy area. Suddenly, there is a very familiar smell.

Mama!

My Mama walks to me and nips my collar. I lean against her.

"Mama!" I bark. "I have so much to tell you."

My Human sits down on the grass. The Breeder Human who trained me to go potty is there with Mama too. She sits beside my Human.

I am so excited to see Mama. I roll and tumble with Mama like she is a puppy in a playdate, but she is stern and nips at me and makes sure I remember she is still my Mama.

Even if I have left my pack, and have a Human, she is always my Mama and she reminds me of this today. I tell her all about how I am learning to be magnificent, how I had my picture taken in front of the shiny wheels because I was such a good howler, and how I don't like Santa.

"Who is Santa?" Mama asks.

"Santa is scary," I say. "He has a beard and wears a big suit. He lives at the shelter."

Mama nudges against me. "What is a shelter?"

"A very bad place!" I say. "My cat friend Merlynn came from the shelter. It's where Humans leave animals they don't want."

"If you do your job," Mama says, "you won't go to the shelter. Are you jumping through hoops and running through tunnels?"

I hang my head. "No," I say. "I got in trouble in my agility class. I was aggressive."

"You must be a good dog and do your job," Mama tells me. "Or else you might go to that place you call the shelter."

I lie down and lick my left paw. When I get nervous, licking my paw is soothing. I am not sure what my job is with my Human. We go to lots of training classes, but that doesn't feel like my job. If I don't know what my job is, then how do I know if I'm doing it well? I keep licking my paws.

The two Humans stand up and it's time to go. I lean against my Mama. "Bye, Mama," I tell her.

"Do you have a good home?" She nuzzles my ear.

I wiggle. "I have the best home. My Human loves me, and I love her very much."

Mama leans back against me and gives my neck a nuzzle.

"Be sure you are a good boy and can always stay in your good home."

The Breeder Human tugs at Mama's leash and she prances along beside her.

My Human leans down and looks into my eyes.  
"Stormy?"

I lick her nose. "I love you, Human."

She giggles and hugs me close. "I love you too, Stormy."



## WHERE ARE THE KEYS?



**M**y Human sets a bag with my food by the door. I am so excited. We are going somewhere fun! Whenever my food gets placed in a bag, it means we are sleeping somewhere else!

I run around in circles and skid across the floor. The Cleaning Human has been here with her mop and the floor is slippery. I like the Cleaning Human. She always gives me treats. But I don't like the carpet machine. It makes a loud noise and I bark in big barks. Merlynn loves the Cleaning Human. She brings her special canned food. After Merlynn eats all of it, she lies on the dining room table, with her eyes half-closed and her body stretched across the shiny surface. She meows to tell us she is the queen of the table. If my Human tries to swat her off the table, Merlynn hisses. I am glad Merlynn doesn't go on the special trips with us. The Cleaning Human checks on her and brings her more special canned food.

I help my Human bring bags to the door. I run by her

feet and up and down the stairs. When my Human has all her bags at the door, she picks up Merlynn and places her in the enclosed closet with her food and special treat sandbox. My Human keeps her there while she gets the bags into the car. The last time we went on a traveling trip with my food bag, Merlynn slipped out as my Human was putting her clothing bag in the car. We waited and waited for Merlynn to come inside, but she hid by the garage and watched us. I smelled Merlynn nearby, but my Human couldn't see her hiding.

We finally left Merlynn outside. I worried about her. How would she get her food? What if the raccoons got her like Cleo? When we returned home a few days later, Merlynn was inside. Merlynn told me the Cleaning Human brought her special food in a can so she came inside. I can't imagine staying outside. I love my Human too much to ever be away from her side for very long.

My Human carries all her bags out to the car. I stand at the door and bark and growl at Merlynn when she tries to get out. She hisses at me. My food bag and I are the last to get into the car. Merlynn stays inside.

We travel in the car for a long time. I take lots of naps, and we stop along the way at special grassy areas where I sniff a lot of other dogs. Finally, we get to the place where the Monster In My Throat attacked me. I hope the Monster In My Throat won't get me this time. After my Human unloads all our bags, we race to the beach. She walks as fast as me and doesn't mind that I pull and pull on the leash. She carries my special long throwing ball toy with her and once we get to the beach, she leans down and unclips my leash.

I dance and dance over the sand. "Throw the ball," I bark at her. "Let's play."

We play ball for a long time as my Human moves us down the beach, each time throwing the ball further. While I run and catch it, she keeps walking so we are moving down the beach. Other dogs play with their balls and sniff driftwood. But I am too focused on our ball game to sniff them.

After we are done with the ball game, we return to the place we call home when we are at the beach. But something is wrong. We stand outside the door and my Human searches her pockets. I can smell fear. She mutters and drops my ball toy. I stand very still. I'm not sure what is wrong, but something isn't right.

My Human walks me back to the beach. I don't know why we are back at the beach. I am hungry and it is time for dinner. My food bag is not with us on the beach. This time my Human doesn't let me off-leash and I am not so excited. I just wanted to take a nap on the comfortable couch while she turns on the fireplace and sits with her book. Rain drips into my fur. I do a couple of shake-offs but the water keeps dripping and I get very wet. A strong wind blows off the ocean waves and my ears flap behind me. Sand flies in my face. There is hardly anyone on the beach. We go over the same sand again and again. Fear is all around us.

My Human finally stops walking and sits down on a large piece of driftwood. She is crying and I lean against her. The rain soaks both of us.

The ocean water has moved up the sand as we walk back and forth. It now covers where we have been walking. This makes her cry harder. I walk very slowly beside her. We get to

another large piece of driftwood. I sniff the driftwood. A little Human has been here and a small pail and shovel is turned over. I sniff and sniff. I am hungry and Little Humans always leave food. There is something on top of the driftwood that smells like my Human. I sniff at it.

"Come on, Stormy," my Human says. She inhales and gasps.

My Human grabs the thing which smells like her and hugs them to her chest.

Then we run. We are running toward the place with our bags. We are running so fast. I didn't know she could run that fast.

We reach the door and she inserts the metal thing and we go inside. She puts my food in a dish, and I eat while she turns on the fireplace. Heat pours into the room. My fur dries as I eat. After I am done eating, we both collapse on the couch in a heap. I curl against her. She has stopped crying and she pets me. "You found my keys," she says.

I snuggle against her, happy to be warm and dry and fed. I have done my job to protect her.

## FINE DINING



**T**he Human smells like roses and lavender. She searches for her shiny fancy shoes in the closet. I know all her shoes and like to sneak into her closet to chew on them. I help her find her shoes and chew on a few shoes that need my mark.

In the car, I sit in my best sit in the back seat. My Human talks to me in that high-pitched voice she uses when we go to new places. I don't really understand her words, but the pitch of her voice says fun. It doesn't take us long to get where we are going and when I get out of the car, I greet two of my dog pal friends with butt sniffs. Charlie and Brewster are not in classes with me, but I know them from my puppy playdates. Charlie and Brewster are small dogs, the same kind of dog I attacked in the agility class. I never would attack Charlie or Brewster. We all share our treats whenever we have puppy playdates. Charlie and Brewster have a fun backyard. It's much bigger than mine, and we jump off big stones chasing each other. My dog friends never visit my yard.

Merlynn says my dog pals can't come over because of her. She says three are too many dogs when there is just one cat.

Charlie and Brewster sniff my butt, and I sniff them in greeting, but we don't spend too much time on the greeting. We don't have to. That's the thing Humans don't realize. When we've met a dog before, all we need is a quick sniff to get reacquainted. It's when a dog is new to us that the sniffing process is lengthy.

The Humans lead us into a dark room that smells like hamburgers, steak, and cheese. The Human attaches my leash to the table leg beside her. I am used to this routine. This is how I help her work during the day. She takes me up to the loft and attaches me to the leg of her desk. I lie beside her and sleep. Every so often, she unhooks my leash and I go outside. In the afternoon, we get into the car and go to the dog park. It's a great routine, and I like being attached to her side all day.

Some of my other dog friends aren't used to the under-the-table routine. They walk around, tangle their leash, and bump against the top of the table. This earns some thumps on the table from the Humans. Humans peer under the table at us and tell my dog pals to sit down. I lie on my belly and watch everything. My Human doesn't have to tell me to sit down.

It's soothing listening to all the Humans talk and I close my eyes. I barely notice when at one point, my Human leans down and moves me across the floor so I am out of the way of other Humans walking by the table.

There is laughter from the Humans at the table and as I hear my name, I smile in my sleep. I am magnificent.

Suddenly, I smell something very good. It's like nothing I have ever smelled. It's chicken and beef and fish all together in one big smell. I scoot from under the table and rise to my full standing position. My dog pals stand and poke their noses in the air.

"What is it?" Charlie's nose sniffs the air.

"Human food," I say and sigh. "It is amazing."

Brewster, Charlie, and a few of my dog pals listen as I tell them all about Human food. I tell them about salt and butter and corn. I tell them about bits of hamburgers with ketchup. I tell them about bread and cheese.

"How do you know what Human food tastes like?" Charlie asks.

"I lick the dishes in the cleaning machine," I say. "And Mom Human gave me some at the sand."

None of my dog pals know about licking the dishes in the cleaning machine. I explain to them how I set my paws on the open door and lick each dish as it goes into the cleaning machine. I also tell them about the sand and how Humans have picnics in the driftwood and leave bits of food behind.

All of us lick our mouths in anticipation of Human food falling from the table in crumbs. But none falls, and the Humans don't pay any attention to us no matter how much we try to stick our noses into their laps or lean against their legs to get their attention.

None of us like this training very much at all.

# THE HURT DOG



**M**y Human brings me to the dog park every day. We park the car and I drag her along the gravel path to the grassy fenced play yard. She never minds if I pull and run on the leash at the park. There is another play area, but it's where the big dogs chase balls. Once, we tried to go into the big dog play area, but I got very afraid. I lay down on my stomach and slunk on the grass. My Human took me over to the small dog area, and that is my play area.

Sometimes big dogs come to the small dog area, even though they aren't supposed to. There is one fancy dog who comes a lot. The dog is about my age, and he is training to be a show dog. He prances around the dog park area like he can't get his paws dirty. I don't like him very much.

I tell Mr. Fancy, "My family are agility dogs, and my dad was a show dog."

It does not impress Mr. Fancy. He holds his nose in the air and prances away from me. Mr. Fancy doesn't have good



manners. When my Human throws my ball, he always steals it. I am very polite because I have been trained not to attack or growl and to wait my turn to play ball.

But after a while, I get tired of my ball being stolen in Mr. Fancy's mouth. "Please help me," I whine to my Human.

She talks to Mr. Fancy's Human and retrieves my ball. I don't think she likes Mr. Fancy's Human. She smells like disgust.

One day, we get out of the car and Mr. Fancy is already in the small dog play area. She walks me back to the car, and we wait until Mr. Fancy leaves. It is very hot in the car, but she keeps the windows rolled down and turns on the car so the fan blows cool air on my fur.

After Mr. Fancy leaves, I am the only dog in the small dog area, and my Human throws my ball across the pen. Sometimes the grass is so high I can barely jump through, but today it's just the right size and I fly across the grass and capture my ball with my mouth. I always run very fast to retrieve the ball and jog in a slow trot back to my Human. I like to savor the moment with the ball before I drop it at her feet for another throw.

Another dog arrives with two Humans; a small Human and a Human the age of my Human. Sometimes very small humans can be scary because I never know what they are going to do. They aren't steady on their feet, and they like to pound on my back which hurts me. I never growl because I have been trained and exposed to lots of Humans, but my Human and I leave if the small Humans are too rough with me.

"Can I pet your dog?" the small Human asks.

She giggles and smells of joy and fun. I nuzzle her hand and she pets me. I dance around in my wiggle dance and she laughs.

The small Human throws a ball for her dog. But her dog won't run after the ball. The dog is about my size and has sad, scared eyes. He smells afraid.

"It's okay," I tell the dog. "Nothing will hurt you here."

But the dog cowers and won't go after the ball.

I sniff the dog and try to tell him everything is safe here. But all I smell is scared and hurt.

It's not Human hurt. It's not that kind of scared and hurt.

The smell is dog hurt. Another dog has hurt this dog.

My Human throws my ball and I chase after it. "See," I tell the other dog, "this is how you do it. There's no one here but us."

I keep chasing my ball and bringing it back. Every time I return, I sniff the other dog. "It's safe here."

After a while, the dog sniffs me. I stand very still.

"Look!" The small Human says. "Our dog is not so scared."

We continue this game of sniff, and I chase my ball for another few rounds.

And then the dog puts its paws down and bows to me in a "Let's play" move.

I dance around and bark at my Human to throw my ball again. I usually don't play with the other dogs at the park, unless it's a Beagle. I always play with Beagles! But now I am happy to smell joy and fun on the dog again. We both chase my ball and I let the other dog get it and bring the ball back.

On the way back to the car, my Human says, "I am so happy with you, Stormy! You are such a good dog! You are magnificent!"

But I know this isn't being magnificent. I didn't win awards or ribbons.

I was just being myself.

## LOST IN THE WOODS



**M**y Human sets her overnight bags by the door, and my food bag is in the middle. She places Santa stuffed friend and my soft blanket on top of the food bag. I can't wait to see where we are going. I love the place with the sand where I catch my ball. We've also been to a big field where the Mom Human lives. I make up a game where I go in and out of the front door like I am racing in agility trials. I careen around thick bushes and make up a course. Mom Human has chickens who smell like both my food and Human food. I like to get close to their pens and sniff. When I am finished with my pretend agility course and the chickens, I race back to the front door, whine, and Mom Human opens it. I get a treat or two or three. Mom Human also gives me Human food from the table when my Human is not looking. It's our little secret.

Mom Human has two dogs. One of the dogs is scary and growls and snaps at me when I get too close, especially at the dinner table where the Humans have their food. The other

dog likes to lie on the porch and gets tired easily. She's a lot older than me and she never snaps at me or tries to bite me. I always respect her space.

As my Human sets bags by the door, Merlynn meows in a loud voice that she uses when she is telling my Human she wants to go out. My Human says something to her in a not nice voice. I think she is telling Merlynn to be quiet. Merlynn can be very loud when she wants to go out. My Human scoots Merlynn out of the way with her foot and picks up the bags. She wraps my leash around her waist and we stumble out the door, me, the bags, and my Human. There is no room for Merlynn to slip out, because we take up so much room. I'm pretty sure my Human planned it that way. The Cleaning Human will visit Merlynn and bring the smelly food in a can. I don't think Merlynn minds that she can't go with us. She just wants to go out.

We don't drive for very long. When we stop, there are a lot of parked cars around us with dogs and Humans. Some people have their windows rolled down and I can smell excitement and joy. I close my eyes and lie down on my special blanket. I have just fallen asleep when I am jolted awake as the car crashes over something which makes a lot of vibrations. My Human drives into a dark place that seems like a tunnel. The other cars are all around us. Then the whole tunnel starts moving. Our car is not moving but something under us is moving. I sit down on my blanket and stare at my Human.

"What's this?" I communicate with her. "It's a little scary." I shake, just a little. She is in the car with me, and I am not that scared. If she wasn't here, I would be very scared.

My Human hands me a handful of special treats, the same ones I get in training. I eat them and stop shaking.

"It's okay, Stormy," she says in her soothing voice. "We're on a ferry."

I'm not sure what a ferry is or where we are going, but as long as she stays in the car with me, I'm sure we'll be fine.

The car feels like it's floating. My Human leans her head back on the car headrest and closes her eyes. I close my eyes too.

The moving slows and my Human says, "We're here, Stormy." Her voice is warm and excited. The air smells like adventure, pine trees, and water.

My Human drives over something that makes the car bump, and then we head up a big road. Tall trees sway in the breeze. I whine in excitement. Any time we are on windy roads with tall trees, it's a good sign. Mom Human lives on a road with tall trees, and driving to the beach, we go on roads with lots of tall trees.

My Human pulls into a gravel road and I can barely contain myself. Gravel. Windy roads. Trees. These are signs of good things to come! I whine and whine.

My Human steps out of the car and leaves me in the back seat. I stand on my hind legs and try to see what is outside. I press my nose to the glass and leave lots of paw prints. The pawprints tell my Human how excited I am to be in the car going someplace fun with her!

My Human is not gone long, and when she returns, she opens the trunk and lifts out the bags. My food bag and her bags. I wiggle and wiggle. I am so excited. We are on an adventure. I love adventures with my Human!

When she lifts me out of the car, I drag her to the first tree I find to pee on. I have not been out of the car since we left our home, and everything is all stored up inside!

My Human leads me up a lot of steps and opens a door. There is a bed in the middle of the room, a chair, and the rug smells like food, dirt, rain, and a little dog pee. My Human opens a small door and I follow her. I look through the railings to the ground below. It makes me a little dizzy. Humans tumble from a car and they wave and point at me.

"Hi, doggie."

I wiggle at them to tell them how happy I am to see them. The Humans laugh.

I lie down on my belly and place my snout through the bars. This gets more laughter from the Humans below. I am being my magnificent self, and everyone loves me.

"Stormy!" The Human places food in my food bowl beside the bed.

I trot inside and eat quickly. She hooks my leash to my collar. We go back down the stairs. I pee and she places me in the car.

My Human drives on curvy gravel roads and we don't drive long. When she stops, there is a house. I sniff the glass doors and paw at the glass. I smell the Mom Human and her dogs. They have been here, but not recently, and they are not here now. The inside of the house is very quiet. There are lots of boards inside, and I don't see any soft couches or beds to sit on.

My Human takes me on a walk down a steep hill with some rocks and dirt. She walks very slowly. I walk by her side

like I have been trained, but I smell something. Something I have never smelled before.

There are snapping branches in the woods.

Something is out there!

I pull hard toward the smell. My Human stumbles and my leash drops from her hand. It drags in the dirt and crashes against sticks and rocks. But I don't care. I am running and running and running. I am running faster than I have ever run before in my life. I am following that smell through the woods.

My leash drags behind me and sometimes gets caught on a stick or log, but I manage to move enough so it comes loose again. The leash is a little heavy attached to my collar, but I keep running. I run up a hill and reach a big house. There are Human smells here. My stomach gurgles and feels empty with all the running I have been doing. I bark and bark.

But no one comes out of the house.

The light in the sky is fading and I am beginning to feel a little scared. I bark and bark but no one comes out of the house. I can't smell my Human and I don't know where I am. I have never been here before. I'm very far away from my Human.

I bark some more but no one comes.

I am lost and I am scared.



# THE WILD CAT



I lie down on the unfamiliar porch and take a nap.

When I open my eyes, it is dark. I am very scared. I don't know where I am and I don't know how to get back to my Human. The scent of the deer I chased is long gone. There aren't any Humans here, and I can't smell my Human at all. I want my Human. I want her soft bed and her warm blankets and her hands petting me. My stomach growls. I never eat when it is dark. I have missed my dinner!

"Whoooooohhhh," I howl. I howl louder and louder. I sound like the siren in the training class where everyone took my picture and told me how magnificent I am. I don't feel magnificent now.

My howling isn't working and no one comes to find me.

"Human!" I bark. "Human! Come find me. My Human!"

A cat darts out of the shadows from underneath the porch. She stares at me. "This is my porch," she hisses.

"I'm lost," I say. "Can you help my Human find me?"

"Be quiet." The cat arches her back. "You bark too much."

"I need to find my Human."

"Leave." The cat darts under the porch.

"I can't leave until my Human finds me. Where are your Humans?" I ask.

"I don't have Humans," the cat says from her spot under the boards. "I am feral."

I have never heard of feral. "What's feral?"

"It means I live in the wild," the cat says. Her voice is muffled as she slips deeper under the porch.

Will I have to be feral if my Human can't find me? I don't want to live in the wild. I like living with my Human. We are a pack!

I bark for what feels like a long time. The woods are quiet, and the cat disappears into the night. I keep barking. Sometimes when I stay at the dog kennel with all the other dogs, we bark a lot. We bark when dogs are picked up and when dogs are dropped off. We bark because one dog starts barking, and we bark because we are bored. But we never bark this much. My throat is hoarse from the barking.

And then I hear something. The sound is far, far away, but I recognize it. My Human's voice!

"Stormy! Stormy!"

Her voice is frantic.

I bark and bark and bark. "I'm here!"

"Stormy! Stormy!"

My Human's voice gets louder.

She is close. I bolt off the empty porch and dash through the woods. My dirty leash drags behind me. "I'm coming," I

bark. The twigs snap and pop under my paws. I run faster than I have ever run.

"Stormy! Stormy!"

There she is standing in front of me! She is on the big far away hill with me! She leans down and I run into her arms.

I feel her tears on her cheeks. The smell of her sadness, worry, and fear engulf us.

"Stormy!" she cries. "I was worried I would have to leave you here! I couldn't find you!"

"Never." I lean against my Human. I press very hard against her legs. "I am your dog! We will always find each other!"

Something moves in the bushes and the feral cat stares at me, her eyes unblinking.

My Human picks up my leash. It is very dusty and dirty from my adventures in the woods.

I walk very close to my Human, and she lifts me into the car. She gives me lots of kisses and treats as I settle onto my special blanket. We drive back to the place with her overnight bag and my food bag.

She pours a lot of food into my bowl and I eat and eat. I also drink a lot of water. All the running around made me very thirsty. When I finish, I jump on the bed. She changes into her sleeping clothes and gets in beside me. She places her arms around me, and I cuddle up against her. I will not be a feral dog like that cat under the porch.

The Human and I are a pack.

## WHO BARKED?



**M**erlynn stretches across the Human's eating table. The Cleaning Human has brought Merlynn a can of the smelly food which makes her eyes cross sideways, and a silly grin stretches across her face.

"Going to take that practice test today?" Merlynn asks me.

Merlynn knows all about my dog training class. Merlynn knows everything. I'm not sure how she does, but she knows everything that happens.

"Yes." I dance around the table in my wiggle dance. I'm excited to take my dog class test and show everyone how magnificent I am! This is the practice test for our real test we will take in a couple of sleeps. This is where I show everyone I have learned all my skills. I know how to walk beside my Human, sit when I am told, lie down when I am told, and most of the time I can walk on the leash beside her. I have practiced with what the Humans call distractions. Big

distractions like howling sirens and people in chairs with wheels and elevators. I know how to walk by other Humans and dogs and not lurch at them until we are told to meet each other. I have sat with the little Humans and listened to them read to me. Even though I am very bored, I only wiggle a little on the floor beside them.

"If you don't pass," Merlynn stretches her left paw toward me as if she is lecturing me. "If you don't pass, you will go to the shelter."

I stop wiggling and sit down hard. My Human has never said if I don't pass the dog training tests that I will go to the shelter. But Merlynn knows everything.

"There were lots of dogs in the shelter," Merlynn purrs. "None of them had passed the dog training tests. That's why they were all in the shelter."

My Human and the Cleaning Human walk by me. "Good sit." My Human hands me a treat from her pocket.

"I'm not going to the shelter," I tell Merlynn. "I will pass the test. I will pass both the practice test and the real test!"

"Mmm..." Merlynn licks a paw. "We'll see."

"Stormy!" My Human calls to me. "Time to go."

I run to the door and my Human clips my leash on me. She also clips on the cloth I wear which buckles under my chest. I only wear the cloth when I visit Humans in chairs and little Humans read to me. My Human loads me into the car and makes sure my leash is tied tight to the back headrest. We drive to the place with the gravel where I take my dog training classes. When my Human unties me and lifts me out of the car, I walk beside her, matching my pace with hers. The leash is very loose as we walk. Neither of us mentions

how I pull on the leash so hard and she hangs on very tight when we are on the woodsy trails.

We go inside and sit in the circle. All my dog pals and their Humans are in the circle but today, none of my dog pals have rawhide bones. Everyone is expected to sit quietly on their blankets or towels. My Human has forgotten to bring a towel for me, and I sit on the hard floor. I don't mind it too much. My fur is long, and I have a fur skirt around my legs for warmth. The fur skirt gets dirty a lot, and my Human says she is going to have it trimmed off as soon as we are done with the tests.

A few sleeps ago, we took a long walk in the woods, and I got very dirty. My Human tried to bathe me, but I whined and howled and tried to get out of the slippery tub. When my Human lifted me out of the bathtub, I shook so hard I got water all over the bathroom. My Human said she wouldn't be giving me too many more baths and the Fur Cut Human could do it. The Fur Cut Human has a big tub with mats. My toenails don't slip on the bottom of her tub. She gives me a doggie massage with shampoo and lots of good treats. I don't mind baths at all with her.

The two Trainer Humans talk to the Humans. It takes a long time, and I am bored. At one point, my Human leaves me tied to the chair with my leash and a treat. When she returns, she places my new, small dog bed on the floor so I can lie down like the other dogs. I don't sleep in this bed at home. I sleep in her bed. This bed is new and needs some of my smells. I turn around for a long time trying to find the best spot to lie in my new bed.

The talking with the Humans goes on and I get restless. I

lift my bed corner and chew. If I chew long enough, I can carve a hole with my teeth and pull out the white stuffing. I have been doing this with all my stuffed friends and it's fun.

I am going to town on my hole and stuffing is flying everywhere when my Human places her hand on my back and moves me away from the hole. But the Trainer Humans keep talking and I maneuver my way back and continue chewing.

The two dogs beside me are given bones to chew. There is a little bit of staring and growling between them. I am too busy chewing my hole to notice, but my Humans freezes as everyone looks to the two dogs growling. I smell relief around my Human when she sees me still chewing stuffing. She is relieved it is not me snarling. I can't pull out stuffing and snarl at the same time. Snarling dogs do not pass tests. No one says anything about my stuffing chewing. I keep chewing on my bed hole.

I have a big hole in my bed when the Human stands up and pulls my leash so I stand beside her. She kicks my bed out of the way and turns the part with the hole toward her chair. I wiggle. She is good at making sure I don't get in trouble with the Training Human.

The Border Collie barks at the Training Human who brings in her dog. I know her dog, it's one of the goofy Labradors who is sometimes at our puppy playdates in the barn. I don't bark, but the Border Collie keeps barking. So I bark at the Border Collie, telling him to be quiet.

The Humans freeze again.

"Who barked?" The Trainer Human says my name.  
"Stormy?"

My Human doesn't say anything. I smell her anxiety. Did I just flunk the test? Will I go to the shelter? "Please," I stare at the Trainer Human. Remember how nice I looked howling for the sirens and everyone took my picture? I am a very good dog!



# THE BUNNY



"Who barked?" The Trainer Human walks around the circle and eyes each dog. Her Lab stops when she stops and walks when she walks.

She stops at the Border Collie. "Petey. No bark! If you bark, you will fail the test."

Petey sits and gives the a remorseful stare.

The Trainer Human turns away from him and signals for my Human and me to walk to her.

I walk very slowly beside my Human. I have escaped the bark scolding. I don't want to be scolded for not being able to walk beside my Human. If Merlynn is right, and I don't pass the test, I don't want to go to the shelter!

When we reach the Trainer Human, I am not tempted to stop and sniff the Lab. I have met him before and he smells the same. Dull and boring. My Human keeps walking, and I stroll beside her as if I have all the time in the day and am in no hurry to reach anywhere.

When we return to our spot in the circle, all the Humans say, "Good job."

My Human gives me a special cheese treat.

"You escaped the bark scold," Petey says. "But you barked too."

"You started it." I turn my body away from him. I don't want to get in trouble.

The day takes a long time, and we repeat all the lessons my Human and I have learned in the training class. I meet and greet the other dogs while my Human talks to their Humans. I walk on a loose leash beside my Human and stop when she says stop. The Trainer Human gives me one of those exams like the lady who smells like medicine, and I stand very still while she examines me and lifts my ears. I know she's not the medicine lady and she doesn't have medicine for my ears, so it's not as hard as the real medicine lady.

The Trainer Human pretends to be the Fur Cut Human. My Human kneels on the floor beside me and keeps her hand on my back. The Trainer Human checks my eyes, rubs her hands along my stomach, and makes sure I don't have any knots in my fur. She picks up each paw and I balance on one leg. My Human keeps her hand on my back the whole time.

When she is finished, the Trainer Human loops her hands around my middle in a big hug. She squeezes and I wiggle. This is silly. Why is she doing this? She is not a little-sized Human. They squeeze me and it makes me tickle and wiggle.

My Human grabs the Trainer Human's hand and shows how to pet me nicely. I liked the squeeze and hug better.

The next part of the practice test is distractions. All the Humans gather in a tight group, and we walk through them. I can't sniff my dog pals or Humans as we pass. This is easy for me. Sometimes when we visit the beach, we walk on the sidewalks. There are always a lot of people on the sidewalks.

Next, we walk up to a chair with wheels. I sniff around the wheels, and we keep walking. Some of my dog pals bark at the wheels. They return to the outer circle and sit with their Humans until they stop barking. Petey barks a lot at the wheels. Petey is not going to pass the practice test. I hope he doesn't have to go to the shelter.

I am doing fabulous and I feel magnificent.

The Trainer Human stands in the center of the circle with a stuffed white bunny friend. She squeezes the stuffed friend and it squeaks. A stuffed friend who squeaks! I want it! I lunge on the leash toward the stuffed bunny. I want to snatch the stuffed bunny and tear it apart and pull out the stuffing!

The Trainer Human tosses the stuffed bunny to the center of the floor.

My Human and I walk by it very slowly. But it is too much temptation for me. I pull on the leash and lunge toward the bunny. I want that stuffed friend!

"Leave it, Stormy!" My Human says.

I ignore her and keep lunging. I am almost to the bunny. I can taste the soft fabric in my mouth.

Snatch! The Trainer Human grabs my leash. She leads me past the bunny friend but instead of walking by it, as soon as we are beside it, she turns her leg into me and I have to turn. The bunny friend is behind me, and I can't turn

around to see it. I'm so surprised to be turned around that I barely have time to think about the bunny friend!

"Stormy needs to practice distractions," the Trainer Human says. "Go ahead and walk through the final part of the practice test."

I stand very still. Have I flunked the practice test?

My Human takes my leash and opens her palm so it's flat. I take the treat and eat. I must not have done too bad. I am getting a treat.

My Human guides me over to my bed. I lie down on my belly and close my eyes.

My Human strokes my back. "You did great, Stormy," she says. "We just need to practice distractions." She mutters under her breath. "And your barking is a problem."

I press against her hand and dream of barking at stuffed bunnies.

## FAMILY REUNION



The Human and I take another one of the long drives, but this time, she doesn't have my food bag or her clothing bags. Sometimes I get a little queasy on long drives and lie down with my head between my paws. When we stop, my Human unhooks me from the back seat and lifts me to the ground.

I sniff. There are a lot of dogs and smells of excitement. The familiar words of my early puppy days are all around me.

"Tunnel!"

"Weave!"

"Jump!"

My Human leads me to a covered space. The smells are so familiar. It's my scent, only just a little different in each dog. I recognize all of them. My mama, uncle, littermates, and sister from another litter.

My magnificent family!

One of my sister littermates walks over to me, but before

I can wiggle and greet her, she shows her teeth and snaps at me! It's worse than Merlynn's hiss. She is my dog sister! I am shocked and take two steps backward. We are family! Why is she snapping at me? The dogs in the dog park don't snap at me when we greet each other.

I stand beside the Human and tuck behind her leg. I am not sure what to do.

My mama is released from a crate. It's not a zippy crate like mine. I sniff her, but she snaps at me just like my sisters. I lie down on my belly and wait for her to sniff me. "Remember me, Mama?" I say. "We met at the park and rolled around in the grass together."

But she turns away from me. I don't understand what I have done. Why does my family snap at me?

My mama is led back to her crate.

I am sad. I am too old now for my mama. I am no longer her pup. I belong to my Human. I love my Human and I don't want any other Humans, but no one told me my dog family would reject me.

I want to tell my dog family that I know what a pet dog is now. It's not something horrible. It's something wonderful. I sleep on my Human's bed every night and keep watch over her. I go to grassy fields and play ball with other dogs. I get lots of treats, and it's really fun to run errands with my Human because we always stop at the place where she rolls down my window and the nice Human hands me a treat and gives my Human a warm drink treat. I want to tell my littermates about Merlynn and how she's not warm and cozy like them, but she knows about everything. I want to tell them how I got lost in the woods on an island. I want to tell them

about going to the fire station, reading with the kids, and most importantly, I want to tell them about running and running on the beach and catching my ball. But none of them want to listen.

The Human and I walk into another area with two dogs who are my brother littermates. One hides behind the legs of his Human the way I once did before I got used to being around other dogs. The other dog gives me a sniff and remembers me. I wiggle. He wiggles back at me. My brother has a short stubby tail like me! We wiggle and sniff each other.

"He's all grown-up and good-looking." My brothers' Human kneels beside me. She pets me. There is love in her hands. I press against her.

"I really wanted him," my brothers' Human says. "But he wouldn't have worked in agility. He was too independent and dominant."

Dominate? Cleo dominated me. Merlynn dominates me. I don't dominate.

My Human leans down. I look up at her and love pools in my eyes. This is the Human to who I belong. She takes me to all the classes. She has learned how to be my Human. I blink at her. I love you, Human. She leans down and kisses my head. "I love you, Stormy," she says. My Human and I understand each other. Our classes have taught us to listen to Human and dog speak.

I have a very good life with my Human, and I am not sad that I am not an agility dog.

The Humans talk to each other for a long time. At one point, I smell sadness. My brother tells me one of our litter-

mates was rehomed three times. No one knows what happened to her.

My Human and I will look for my lost sister as we go through my life. Sometimes, on the beach, there will be another black Cocker Spaniel who is my age. My Human will always ask where this dog came from. None of them are ever my sister. We are a litter of very loved dogs. Our Breeder Human works hard to raise good dogs. When one of us does not find a good home, it's a sadness for all of us—Humans and dogs.

My Human and I watch my dog family perform the tunnels, hoops, and weaves. My family is very fast and many of them come in first. They get blue ribbons and pictures that I know will hang on the wall. Humans cheer for them, and I give my best bark to tell my family I know how magnificent they are in agility.

After a while, I get bored. A little girl sits near us. I wiggle, and she walks over to pet me. I sit vey still, and she pets me for a long time.

Everyone praises me for how I sit with the girl and what a wonderful dog I am becoming.

After my family performs the hoops, jumps, and weaves, we join them again. My mama is out of her crate, and so is my sister.

I sniff my sister, and she doesn't snap at me. "You were great," I say.

"It's my job. What's your job?"

"I am a pet dog," I say. "I chase balls at the park, visit the beach, and take pictures with the man in the red suit. The Humans call him Santa. I don't like him."



"That doesn't sound like a job," my sister says.

I am confused. A pet dog is my job. But my sister is right. Chasing balls, going on beach trips, and getting my picture taken with Santa isn't a job.

"We all have jobs," my sister says. "You must have a job."

"You did good with the little Human," my brother says. "Maybe that's your job."

"Yes!" I wiggle. "Little Humans talk at me with books. It gets very boring, but maybe that is my job!"

"Dog jobs are not boring," my brother says. "They are the purpose for us. I don't think that's your job."

"Stormy!" My Human says. "It's time to go."

I wiggle and sniff my family. "Goodbye," I say. "Good luck with your jobs!"

They wiggle back at me. No one has a tail. I can't wait to tell Merlynn that my family doesn't have tails! There is nothing wrong with me. Not having tails is part of being a Cocker Spaniel!

I walk beside my Human. My paws thump on the ground. "What is your job? What is your job?"

## THE BIG TEST



**T**he next day, my Human takes me to the dog park, and I run and run and run. I chase my ball for a long time, and I spend an extra long time at the park. By the time she leads me to the car, I am exhausted.

I sleep on my special blanket in the back seat, and when I wake up, we are at the dog and Human training place. My Human leaves me in the car and goes inside. It doesn't take her long before she returns.

"This is it, Stormy," she says.

I don't know what "it" is, but her voice is serious and I know whatever "it" is means I need to be on my best behavior. I smell tension as she buckles the special cloth under my chest. I ignore the tickles from the buckles. Yesterday, I went to the Fur Cut Human. She combed my fur skirt and bathed me with smelly shampoo. My Human brushes my fur skirt, and I try to lean against her a little to tell her whatever she is worried about, it will be okay. She is with me!

We walk to the door of the big room where I have had all

my classes with other dogs. The blowup sandcastle is in the corner of the room. I can't wait to pee on it! I have gotten very good with peeing on sandcastles at the beach. There are a lot of them of all sizes for me to leave my mark. Sometimes there are plastic shovels and buckets too. No one ever comes after me with a spray bottle for peeing.

I wait by my Human's side. I stand very tall, and I don't pull on the leash at all. None of my dog pals are here and I feel magnificent. I am very special today!

"Welcome, Stormy!" The Training Human says. "This is your big test."

Test! This is my big test where I show how magnificent I am! This is the one where Merlynn tells me I will go to the shelter if I don't pass. I shake just a little.

"Are you ready to do your job?" The Training Human asks.

Job! This is my job! Just like my family. My job is to pass this test so I can sit with little Humans who read to me and let Humans in wheelchairs pet me. I stop shaking. I can do this. This is my job!

I stand very tall and we walk into the room where a woman I don't recognize meets me. She smells like onions and rotten food, and I hang back a bit. The Training Human doesn't like how I greet her and we have to do it again. My Human stiffens beside me. I want to do my job, but I don't know how to tell my Human that this Human smelled bad. I am trying to protect my Human by not greeting the bad-smelling Human. Most Humans smell like love, but sometimes there will be one who does not. These Humans have a rotten smell. It is my dog job to protect

my Human and not let the rotten-smelling Humans near her.

A different Human steps into the room.

My Human says, "Greet her, Stormy."

I wiggle around and do my happy dance. This Human smells like fun and joy and love.

My wiggles get a big laugh from the Training Human, who holds a big clipboard. She writes a lot on the clipboard. My Human relaxes, and although I still smell fear, I smell her warm, welcome love that always enfolds our home.

My Human raises her hand up and then motions downward and I sit. I don't get a treat but that's okay. Sometimes my Human asks me to do commands and doesn't give me a treat. She says I'm not a puppy in training anymore and dogs should know how to do commands without being given treats every time.

We meet and greet another dog. I turn a little bit sideways when a bird flies by the window and we have to do it again.

When we finish, my Human leads me to the center of the room, and the Training Human rubs under my chest. It tickles but I stand still. But when she reaches for my ears, I jerk back. The Human has been giving me medicine drops in my ears for days. The medicine drops make my ears sting a little.

There are words between the Training Human and the other people in the room. I sit down next to my Human and lean against her.

"I'm sorry," I tell her silently. "But I don't like when people lift my ears."

The Training Human returns to me with a brush. She brushes my back and long skirt. I stand very still just like I do when I get haircuts. Everyone applauds, and this makes me feel magnificent. I am doing my job!

My Human leads in a circle around the room. We pass the blowup sandcastle and I try to veer over to pee, but my Human gives my leash a hard jerk.

"No, Stormy," she whispers.

I shake it off. I will pee on the sandcastle later.

The Training Human writes something on her clipboard.

My Human leads me to a carpet, and I sit down beside her.

Four Humans line up in front of us and I am very excited to meet them, but before they can approach, a car door slams outside.

I jump up.

"Bark. Bark. Bark."

The Human shushes me and tries to make me sit down again. She yanks on my leash and tries to force me into a sit. But I don't want to sit. Someone is outside! Danger! I am protecting my Human! I am letting her know someone is coming.

"Bark. Bark. Bark."

My Human keeps trying to make me sit, and I struggle against her. After a couple of rounds of barking, I can't smell a bad Human nearby and stop barking.

I smell panic as my Human tries to force me into a lying position. But I don't want to lie down. I stiffen and push against her hand. I need to stay alert! I am protecting her!

Four Humans approach us and sit down on the carpet. I jump into a standing position, wiggle out of my Human's grasp, rush over to them, and pop into their laps. One after another, I jump into their laps. It's so much fun. I love Humans who sit on the floor with me!

But my Human smells sad and upset. She doesn't like this game at all.

We stand up, and she takes me through the other dog commands. I am very good at leaving the squeaky bunny on the floor. We have practiced this a lot at home. At the end of the test, I take a treat from an open palm and wiggle. Everyone laughs.

But my Human does not laugh. She still smells very sad.

As we walk toward the door, I make one more final attempt to veer to the sandcastle, but my Human's leg is in the way.

Outside, my Human leads me to the grassy area and I pee a lot. I didn't know I could pee that long! All of the testing commands make my pee store up inside.

My Human lifts me into the back seat and buckles my leash in. "We flunked, Stormy," she says. Her voice is sad, and wetness falls on her face.

I don't know what flunked is, but I wiggle forward on the seat and sniff her.

"I love you, Human," I tell her. "I protected you."

But she is too sad to understand me.

When we get home, Merlynn slithers out from behind the couch, where she is scratching a big hole my Human hasn't seen. The Cleaning Human covers the hole with a long blanket and drapes it over the back of the couch.

"I flunked," I tell Merlynn and wiggle around her. She won't let me sniff her, and when I get close, she bats her paw at me with the claws out. "What is flunked?"

"Flunked means you failed," Merlynn says. "The Human is going to take you to the shelter."

"My Human loves me," I say. "I am magnificent. She is not taking me to the shelter."

"You flunked the test," Merlynn says. "That was your job. Now you don't have a job."

I stop wiggling. I do have a job. My job is to protect my Human. I helped her find her keys when she lost them at the beach. I gave her love when she felt sad with the people in wheels with chairs. I bark at the dogs and smelly Humans who live behind us to tell them to stay away from us. I slept beside her when Cleo died and took my place in her bed as her pack. My job is to be a pet dog, comforting and loving my Human.

My Human kneels beside me. I sniff her face. "I love you," I say. "I'm sorry I failed the test, but my job is to be your pet dog."

My Human wraps her arms around me and pulls me close to her. "I love you, Stormy," she says. "You are always my pet dog."

I lick away the sadness that falls down her face. She understands me. The training classes have taught us to hear each other.

When all the sadness is gone, my Human stands up. "We're going to the beach." She walks to the closet and gets my food bag. She places it by the door and goes upstairs to pack her clothing bag.

"We're going to the beach!" I pounce at Merlynn. My paws are big and fluffy, and Merlynn skitters away from me.

"What's the beach?" Merlynn licks one paw a safe distance away from me.

"It's a place with sand everywhere!"

"Sand?" Merlynn licks her other paw. "A big sandbox?"

"It's not a box." I lie down on my belly and stare at her. "It's a place where I run and chase my ball for long spaces. Dogs don't have to be on leashes, and sometimes, Mom Human feeds me Human food!"

My Human laughs and clips my leash to my collar. "Let's go."

I pull us to the car. "We are going to the beach!"



## BEST TAIL WAG



**M**y Human walks me down the sand. There are lots of dogs everywhere! Humans sit in chairs and cheer for the dogs as they race, catch frisbees and balls. I wiggle and wiggle.

It's like dog school only much better. It's a dog competition on the beach!

In my first competition, I line up with other dogs my size. We stand in a big circle. I am so excited. I wiggle and wiggle. My Human stands way down the sandy beach with other Humans.

"Go!" The Competition Human says. He blows a loud whistle.

"Stormy!" My Human calls.

I run toward her. But I don't run in a straight line. It's so exciting with all the other dogs. I bark and chase. Two of the dogs grab each other's muzzles and tussle each other. I lie down on my belly and slither in the sand, just like in puppy playdates, and bark at them.

"Stormy!" My Human calls.

I shake the sand off myself and run in her direction. A seagull swoops above my head and lands four feet away. In a flash, I dart after the seagull. My feet fly out from beneath me and I race over the thick sand. This is so much fun.

"Stormy!" My Human shouts.

I turn toward her. I am very far away from my Human and the other dogs. I run toward my Human and keep running until I reach her. I am the last one to reach my Human, but it doesn't matter. She gives me a lot of my favorite cheese. Some of the dogs get fancy blue ribbons which the Humans clip to their collars. I want a blue ribbon! If I can win a blue ribbon, I will have my picture taken. My picture with Santa is the only picture my Human framed. But it doesn't stay out all the time. She only gets it out when it's time for the fake tree to be in our living room. My Human needs a framed picture of me with a blue ribbon.

My Human leads me to a spot where I stretch out in the sand beside her. Dogs chase frisbees, and small dogs dash around in a circle. When they finish, they lie on the sand beside their owners and eat special treats, even if they didn't win.

"Line up!" The Judge Human says.

My Human and I stand in a line with other dogs of all sizes. All the dogs have long ears like mine. The Judge Human walks alongside each dog. He picks up each dog's ears and uses a measuring tape to measure the length of the ear. I hold very still when he gets to me. I don't like the insides of my ear being touched with medicine, but this is not medicine.

When the Judge Human finishes measuring all the dogs' ears, he calls each dog's name and they line up. I am in the middle of the line. My ears are not the longest, but they are not the shortest. The Judge Human hands out ribbons. I don't get one.

My Human pets me. "That's okay, Stormy. There are other events today."

We move over to a different line with a different set of dogs. This time all the dogs have very short tails. Some are even shorter than mine! I didn't think any dog had a shorter tail than mine! All the dogs in the puppy classes had tails. There was one other dog who looked like me and said he was a Cocker Spaniel, but he had a tail.

No one is trying to sit down and hide their short tail. There aren't any cats to swish their long tails here!

The Judge Human walks to each dog and measures the tails. When he is finished, we line up. This time I am closer to the front, but when they hand out the ribbons, I still do not get a ribbon. I do not have the shortest tail.

We all get special treats and I wiggle a lot! Everyone laughs when I wiggle.

My Human lines me up for another event. All the other dogs in the line are wagging their tails. A lot!

I remember Cleo telling me I didn't have a tail. I remember seeing myself in the Human's mirror without a tail. I remember Merlynn lying on the table and swishing her tail. Why am I in a line with dogs who have long swishy tails like the cats?

The Judge Human who gives us special treats walk by and I wiggle at them. Everyone makes that Human sound

which tells me I am magnificent. I wag my short tail hard, and my back end moves back and forth in what my Human calls the wiggle dance.

"Best tail wag!" The Judge Human clips a blue ribbon to my collar. I stand very tall and straight. I have a blue ribbon. I am a magnificent dog who wins, just like my dog family!

I am a blue-ribbon dog for best tail wag, and I don't even have a long tail!

My Human takes my picture and so do a lot of other people.

After we arrive home from the beach, my Human frames my picture. She places it on her bookcase. She also asks an Art Human to paint my blue-ribbon picture. When it is finished, my Human hangs the painting on the wall where everyone can see it.

I like to sit below my picture and stare at myself.

"Mmm..." Merlynn strolls by and swishes her tail. It bats across my face and tickles. "You still don't have a tail."

She struts toward her sandbox.

I bark. "But I am magnificent!"

Merlynn hops on the table and looks down at me. "I don't think so. Not yet."

TAILS FROM THE  
BEACH



## COTS



Another season passes with the wet leaves on our deck, a visit to Santa, and barking at the dogs who live behind us. I don't have to go to training classes anymore, and my Human and I spend a lot of time at the park with all the dogs.

And then one day, my Human places her going-away bags by the door. I run around in circles as she places my food bag by her bags. But this time, she also sets Merlynn's food bag next to mine. Merlynn is going with us!

The Human stands Merlynn's crate by the door. In one swoop, she picks Merlynn up and deposits her in the crate. She moves the crate by the door with my food bag and her clothing bags.

I sniff Merlynn in her crate. She hisses at me, but I ignore her.

"You are coming to the beach too!" I can't contain my excitement and run around on the slippery floors.

By the time my Human loads the car, there is barely

room for me in the back seat! My Human never has this many things in the car when it's just her and me. Merlynn's sandbox is in the back seat, but it doesn't have any of Merlynn's tasty treats or her gritty sand. And I have to share the back seat with a canvas bag and poles. She folds a seat down and I can see the trunk. If I wasn't tethered to the leash, I could crawl into the trunk where my Human stores my food bag and her clothing bag.

I whine a little as my Human gets in the front seat. Merlynn is in her crate on the seat next to my Human.

My Human turns around and hands me a special treat of cheese. I scarf it up and press my face against the window glass. I like to lick the glass and leave my scent all over. My Human doesn't like this very much, especially because I've made an entire area of the window that she can't get clean with her spray bottle.

Merlynn is very chatty today and a couple of times, my Human bangs on the top of her box.

The banging doesn't make Merlynn stop talking. "Out," she meows. "Out. Out. Out."

I know she's not getting out, not here on the moving pavement beneath the car wheels.

I bark at Merlynn. "Be quiet!"

My Human doesn't like my barking. It makes her jump and she steers the car in a sharp turn. She looks in her mirror and her eyes meet mine. "Stormy!" she snaps.

Merlynn keeps talking. "Out. Out. Out."

We stop at a couple of grassy pee places and there are lots of other dogs who sniff the grass while attached to their



leashes. Merlynn isn't allowed to get out of her crate to go to the grassy pee places.

"Out." Merlynn meows at my Human when we get back in the car.

My Human ignores her.

We drive for a long time and I take a nap. Merlynn is still talking when I wake up.

My Human plays loud music. I'm pretty sure it's to drown out Merlynn's meows. A bad smell comes from Merlynn's crate.

"Did you pee in your crate?" I bark at her. I would never pee or poop in my crate. I am crate trained to go outside to do my business.

"No," Merlynn hisses.

I sniff. I smell little pee smells coming from Merlynn's crate. She may not have peed, but I think she leaked a little. Sometimes that happens to me when I have to be in my zippy crate for a long time. My Human always washes my blankets and stuffed friends afterward. Merlynn needs her crate cushion washed.

The car bounces on gravel. I press my face against the window glass and whine. Gravel under the tires always means we are somewhere fun!

When we stop, my Human unties my leash from the back seat headrest and I jump down from the car. She leads me up some steps. I smell the salt and sand. A big seabird flies over us and sits on the roof. My Human opens the door. I dash inside a big empty room with slippery floors just like we have at home. My feet slide out from under me.

I dash to a large glass door where I can see outside. My

Human opens the door and I bound out. I run across the deck and down two stairs. I race around, sniffing and barking. I am so excited. There are so many great bird, sea, and sand smells.

I mark a grassy area with my pee and run back up the porch. I bark at the glass door. My Human opens it and I race to the front door while my Human unloads the car and brings in all our bags and boxes. She brings in Merlynn's crate and opens her door. The pee smell fills the room. My Human pulls out the smelly cushion and walks it down the hall. She shoves it inside one of the machines that clean Human's clothes.

Merlynn heads toward the open glass door. My Human shuts the door with a firm thump and shows Merlynn where her sandbox is located. She has placed it inside the closet with the clothing cleaning machine. Merlynn disappears and when she returns, I smell her tasty sandbox treats.

My Human opens a special can of wet food for Merlynn.

Merlynn eats, and my Human unzips the canvas bag. She lays out a big piece of canvas and I walk all over it. My Human laughs and swats me away.

She fits the long poles together, but it takes her a while and I get bored and go eat Merlynn's tasty treats. When I return, my Human is still trying to fit the poles together. She forgets to close the glass door all the way. I lie down and sniff. There are lots of birds eating little pieces of bushes and grass. I whine, and my Human opens the door wide and I charge after them. I am not fast enough to get them, but it's a fun game. When I return, she still hasn't gotten the poles together.

There aren't any cozy beds or couches in this new place and I wonder where we are going to sleep. I am getting sleepy and want to take a nap.

Merlynn slips out the open glass door and lies down on the porch. She sprawls across the top step and chatters at the birds flying around. A large seabird swoops low toward Merlynn.

"Go away," I bark at the seabird.

Merlynn scurries back inside and tries to hide, but there isn't any furniture to hide under. She hurries to the back room, but there isn't any furniture there either. Finally, she lies down in the hall outside the bathroom where her food is. She has the look on her face that says she is trying to act like it all doesn't matter. But I know she is scared of that bird.

"I will take care of it for you," I tell Merlynn. I poof myself up and charge to the glass door. I bark and paw at the door. My Human drops one of the poles and it clatters against the floor. She opens the door and I charge outside and run around the backyard barking and barking and barking.

The big white bird sits on top of the roof and watches me. "I will get you," I tell the big white bird. "You stay away from my cat friend!"

The bird lifts its' wings and flies high in the sky.

I am in charge!

When I come inside, the poles are together and the canvas lies in between the poles. There is a little space under the poles and Merlynn lies underneath. My Human has strewn some thick blankets and a pillow across the canvas. I jump on top and make myself a bed. It's nice she made me

my own bed! I don't know where she's going to sleep, but this is a great bed for me!

My Human doesn't think the same thing. She pushes me aside and I jump off to the floor. My Human lies down on the blankets. I jump right back up, but it's really small. I can't even turn around. I settle between her legs and place my head on her stomach. Merlynn lies on the floor underneath us. My Human leaves one of her sweatshirts for Merlynn to curl into, but Merlynn doesn't like the sweatshirt. She tries to jump onto the blanket bed with my Human and me, but there is not enough room. She tries to knead herself into my Human's hair.

My Human cries out, and I move forward alongside my Human until I can pounce on Merlynn. The entire blanket bed shakes, and my Human pushes both me and Merlyn to the ground.

I sit in my best sit and look at my Human. "You didn't mean to push me off," I plead with her. "I always sleep with you."

My Human pats the blankets and I jump up. This bed is not like our beds at home. It shakes when I move. I don't want to get pushed off again. I creep alongside my Human until I am lying stretched out beside her, pressed up against her back.

Merlynn jumps on her food counter. When she is finished, she scratches in her sandbox. But I don't smell a tasty treat and stay pressed against my Human in the blanket bed.

My Human and I stay this way the whole night as the rain patters on the big windows above our head. Merlynn lies

beside my Human on the other side, and the seabird walks on the roof. Something hoots in the distance.

I bury myself in between my Human's legs.

Merlynn's eyes stay open the whole night.

It's scary in this new place at the beach.

## BALL THIEVES



**I**n the morning, my Human attaches my leash to my collar. We walk outside and onto a gravel road. The gravel is a little sharp in between my paws and I pull my Human toward a grassy spot. As I sniff and pee, a man in a chair with wheels rolls to us.

He holds out a dog treat and I take it from him. I am not scared of wheels on chairs like most dogs. I have been trained in my training classes. The man holds out another treat and I take it from him.

He and my Human talk for a while and I hear my name. I wiggle and he reaches into a basket attached to the front of his chair with wheels. He gives me two treats this time.

There is more Human talk, and then there is a lot of commotion. Three dogs come out of the house next to ours with a Human. She tries to hold onto all of them, and she has one of those ball throwers like my Human.

They all pull toward us in a big heap and the Human can barely hold on. I feel the tension on my leash from my

Human and I plant my paws on the ground. The dogs all sniff me at once. One of them is shy and hangs back. One tries to get up on me, and I have to use my best growl to tell the dog I don't like other dog paws on my back. One dog ignores me and takes treats right out of the man in the chair with wheels' bag without asking!

The Human pulls that dog back, and she almost falls because the dog is so strong. She waves her arms up a big gravel hill, and my Human falls in step with her. The Humans talk, and I step in line with the other three dogs. They are different than the dogs I know from my puppy classes. They speak dog, but I don't understand them. It's not the English dog language, it's the Spanish dog language.

But we all speak the language of the dog walk and pull our Humans up the big, tall hill. They are both panting hard at the top and have to stop. We keep pulling, and pretty soon, all of us are running over tall grassy dunes to the big sand and ocean below.

My Human unhooks my leash, and the other dogs are already unhooked and running down the grassy dunes. A ball soars over my head and I'm not sure if it's mine, but I don't have long to figure it out because the three dogs go flying over each other in a snarling heap to get to the ball.

My Human calls my name, waves my ball thrower, and hurls it in the opposite direction of the other dogs. I race down the dunes and across the sand as fast as I can go. My feet fly out from underneath me. The sand is so soft, and I can't believe how well it makes me run. I grab my ball in my mouth and do a big wide circle with my ball. I trot back to

my Human, who is now at the bottom of the dunes, standing with the other Human.

I never run as hard on my way back with my ball as I did on the way to fetch it. I'm not sure why; it's just the way I like to do it.

When I reach my Human, I dance in a circle around her with my ball in my mouth. She laughs, and I wiggle and dance more. Finally, I drop my ball, but this time when she throws it, one of the other dogs races past me and grabs it first. They run around with my ball in their mouth. I wait patiently like I've been trained, and I do not snarl or snap at the dog. It doesn't work, and I plead with my Human to get my ball.

She walks over to the dog, but I smell her hesitation and fear. She doesn't want to stick her hand in the dog's mouth, and the dog is not dropping my ball. My Human talks to the other Human, and she tries to get my ball from her dog. But her dog is not dropping my ball.

My Human says something to the other Human and snaps my leash to my collar. We walk back up the dunes without my ball. I don't like these dogs very much.

When we get to the bottom of the gravel hill, the man in the chair with the wheels is still there. He holds out a treat and calls my name. I run over to him and forget about my ball. The other dogs are still on the beach, and the man in the chair with the wheels gives me a few more treats.

Later, I hear the dog ball thieves running along the fence next to my yard.

I bark and bark and bark.

"Ball thieves. Ball thieves. Ball thieves."



# THUNDER



**M**erlynn dashes to the deck from the backyard. A seabird swoops overhead while a flock of crows screeches from the limbs of a tall tree. I stand on the deck and bark at the crows. Merlynn sprawls on the deck. She licks her paws like she wasn't just running across the yard in a big ball of fear. Merlynn pretends she is not afraid of anything.

“Did you find yard treats?” I sniff at her mouth.

She ignores me and keeps cleaning herself.

Merlynn gets to wander all over. She uses the deck to give her leverage to leap to the fence and then jumps onto the gravel by our car. Sometimes she walks along the edges of the fence like it's a balance beam. I've seen her stumble, but she never falls off. Her favorite place is the yard next door. She spends a lot of time over there. But she always comes in when the seabirds swoop too low.

“Stormy.” My Human holds up my leash.

I dash in a circle and pounce at Merlynn. “I am going for

a walk!”

Merlynn doesn't care. Sometimes she follows us up the big hill, but she always finds something in the bushes and doesn't follow us to the beach. I tell her she would like the big sandbox, but cats don't go to the beach. She says they don't like the big ocean waters.

My Human hooks my leash to my collar and we are out the door. I do a hard dash and pull her up the hill. She always stops at the top and takes deep breaths.

I smell elk. They leave their large poops on the sidewalk. I don't like to eat them the way I like to eat Merlynn's special treats. The elk are bigger than horses. Some of them have antlers. They walk by our cottage at night. I bury into my Human in the blanket bed. The elk smell. But their poop smells worse. I don't even want to sniff the elk poops because they smell so bad!

My Human barely has time to grab the poop bags from the dispenser because I am pulling her so hard to the beach. Finally, we step onto the sand dunes and she releases my leash from my collar. I fly down the dunes with my ears flying out behind me.

There are a lot of small people on the sand today! Sandcastles, buckets, towels, and picnic baskets are everywhere!

I lift my leg to pee on a towel and mark it as mine.

“Stormy!”

I walk two steps and find a sandcastle. I make a river around the sandcastle with my pee. No one comes at me with the squirt bottle.

A little boy waves his sand shovel at me. He stands inside a big hole in the sand. I wiggle down the hole and sniff him.

He leans down and I give him lots of my lick kisses. This just makes him giggle, and I wiggle even more.

“What’s your name?” he asks.

“Stormy,” my Human answers for me in a language the boy can understand. I know he can’t understand bark.

“Does he make lightning?” the little Human asks.

This makes my Human laugh.

I wiggle. There is so much joy smell from the little human and my Human. That’s the thing I love best about the sand. The Humans are always so happy. The sand makes them happy. And little Humans are the best. They are always happy and when they are on the sand, it just spreads and spreads.

My Human calls me out of the sand hole, and I give him one more lick kiss. He giggles and waves at me, “Bye, Thunder,” he says.

I know Thunder is not my name, but it’s a good name.

My Human throws my ball and I fly down the beach to retrieve it. The ball-thief dogs are not on the sand, and all the other dogs have balls or Humans attached to them. No one tries to steal my ball today.

We play for a long time. When we get home, Merlynn lies across the front porch. “It’s about time,” she purrs as she stretches and stands.

My Human opens the door. I go inside first, and Merlynn meows and rubs against the porch poles. My Human doesn’t like this game and shuts the door.

A few minutes later, Merlynn appears at the back window and presses her face to the window. She meows very loudly.

My Human opens the back door and tsks her for not coming in with us a few minutes ago. Merlynn doesn't care.

My Human feeds me dinner and I scarf it down.

Merlynn never walks too close to me with my food bowl because I growl at her, and she doesn't like that. She hops onto the kitchen counter. My Human picks her up and drops her to the ground in a hard thump.

Merlynn sprawls on the floor. She licks her paws and cleans herself.

I finish my dinner and stand at the door to go out. Merlynn waits at the door with me.

My Human sighs and opens the door. Merlynn hops out and under the porch while I dash across the backyard, chasing the small birds. When I am done, I scoot under the porch. Merlynn leaves her tasty special snacks under the porch, and a fresh one is waiting for me. Afterward, I join my Human on the porch. Merlynn reappears when my Human brings out her dinner plate. My Human sits in her folding chair while I wait for scraps. I touch my Human with my paw to remind her I am here. Merlynn sticks her nose right into my Human's plate and drags a piece of chicken off the plate.

"No, Merlynn!" My Human uses her bad voice.

Merlynn drops the chicken on the ground where I snarf it up.

My Human glares at both of us and goes inside. She leaves us on the porch and shuts the door.

I lick my lips, and Merlynn stretches across the porch.

Merlynn and I are a good team.

## MY BROWN EYEBROWS



**M**y Human unhooks my leash from the back seat of the car and I hop out. I pull her up the steps and bark at her to hurry up with the keys to open the door. I can't stop shaking. When she has the door open, I don't wait for her to walk in first. I run to the couch and bury into the cushions, blankets, and pillows. The couch arrived a few days ago with beds for my Human and me, a table for Merlynn to lie across, and a bed for Merlynn to hide under in the room near her food. I am so glad to have the couch pillows to hide in.

Merlynn stretches across the table. "Grooming day," she purrs.

"I'm naked!" I tuck as far as I can into the deep cushions. The cushions make me feel safe.

"You do look a little bare," Merlynn says. "Where is all your fur?"

I whine. I have a new Fur Cut Human at the beach. She makes me stay in a cage until it's my turn. She handles me

with rough hands and cuts until all my fur lies on the floor and I shiver on the table.

"Stormy?" My Human stands over the couch. "What's wrong?"

"He got a horrible groom," Merlynn meows.

My Human doesn't speak cat language. She and Merlynn never went to cat school so they could learn to communicate.

I bury into the pillows. I whine a little more.

"I have a special treat for you, Stormy," my Human says in that voice she uses that I can't resist. I hop off the couch and forget about my short fur. I give a little bark as she reaches into the freezer and pulls out one of my favorite raw bones.

"Here you go." She rubs her hand over my back. "Mmm...I think your fur is a little too short."

I lie down with the bone between my paws and lick the freezer ice off the bone. The deep, rich taste of raw meat takes away my feelings of nakedness.

Merlynn walks around the table and gets too close to me.

"Grrrr..." I snap at her. "My bone."

She jumps away and meows at me. "I don't want your bone. I am not a dog. I don't like bones."

But I know different. Merlynn likes all food. She hops up on the counter while my Human cooks her Human food. Merlynn licks bowls, spoons, and plates.

"I don't get special treats," Merlynn meows at me. "You take my mice treats."

I do take Merlynn's special pretend mice. They are small, and Merlynn likes to bat them around and push them under the couch. But I like to chew them. They are just the right

size for my mouth. My Human always yanks them out of my mouth and says, "No, Stormy. You will choke on these!"

I lick and chew my bone for a while and forget about my naked fur. When I am done, my Human opens the door and I chase a bird around the bushes. I never catch them. But Merlynn catches the chipmunks who live in the woodpile. She brings them inside and lays them on the floor beside her food. My Human doesn't like these presents on the floor.

I trot back inside and my Human gives me a treat from the dog treat jar. Merlynn doesn't have a cat treat jar. She once got a package of treats and then threw them up all over the rug after she ate them. My Human said no more cat treats. When the Cleaning Human leaves Merlynn treats, my Human gives them to her sister and her cats. Merlynn doesn't care. She just wants the wet smelly food.

I feel my naked fur and shake.

"Stormy." My Human kneels beside me. "It's okay." She wraps her arms around me in a tight hug. The hug helps for a little while.

My Human rubs my ears and then stops. "Where are your brown eyebrows?"

I wiggle. I'm not sure what she's asking me.

"Stormy." My Human places her hands near my eyes. I don't like her hands close to my eyes. I dart out of her reach and dance away.

My Human places her hands on her hips and stares at me.

I bark at her.

She keeps staring.

I bark and dance around. This is a fun game.

"Stop barking." She says. "Your brown eyebrows are gone."

Merlynn walks by. Her tail swishes in my face. "Your brown eyebrows are gone."

"My eyebrows are gone?"

I rush to the back bedroom and stand in front of the mirror. It's too tall and I can't see myself. I run to the door with the large window. It's dark and my Human has turned on lights. I am reflected in the window. I know the reflection is me, and I don't bark at myself the way I used to when I saw my reflection.

I stare hard at myself. All my fluffy fur is missing, and I am small. I don't like this look. I don't look magnificent. My short tail is still the same, and when I stand up and wiggle, the small stub wags.

"See." Merlynn sits down beside me. Her reflection in the mirror never changes. She always looks the same. She doesn't go to the Fur Cut Human.

I stare at myself.

"Your brown eyebrows have disappeared," Merlynn meows. "Above your eyes. You had big, thick, bushy brown eyebrows and now it's just short, stubby, black fur."

"Follow me." Merlynn leads me to the hallway. We sit under a picture of me when I won best tail wag. My blue ribbon hangs down the front of me and shows some of the white hair on my chest. In the picture, my brown eyebrows are big and bushy. Merlynn is right. My brown eyebrows are missing.

"I don't have a picture," Merlynn meows.

"You haven't won a blue ribbon," I say.



Merlynn stands and turns so her tail swishes across my face. She heads into the bathroom and lands on the sink. "Meow. Meow. Meow. Turn on the water."

My Human walks over to me. "What are you doing, Stormy?" She pets me. "Looking at your picture?"

"Meow," Merlynn says.

My Human sighs. She walks into the bathroom and turns on the water. My Human returns to me. "Don't worry," she says. "We'll figure out what happened to your brown eyebrows."

I stare at my picture.

The Fur Cut Human stole my brown eyebrows.

## LOCAL DOGS



**E**very morning, the Human and I take long walks on the sand. Most of the time, we walk up the gravel hill and down the dunes. I run and play with my ball. The sunlight comes over the hill and the tide takes the water away from us. There is a lot of sand to run on in the morning. The Humans who walk on the sand with their dogs always greet my Human. I sniff the other dogs, and my Human talks to the other Humans. Sometimes we all walk together in one big pack. We all run off-leash and sniff the driftwood. Our Humans follow behind with blue poop bags and make sure we don't leave anything behind on the sand. All the Humans carry treats to give to me. When the ball-thief dogs are on the sand, I always make sure to keep my ball in my mouth when we are near them.

Sometimes my Human drives us to a different part of the sand and there are a lot of people. I stay on my leash because there are so many people and dogs. There are all different

types of dogs—small dogs, big dogs, medium-sized dogs. Some are old, some are young like me, and some are medium age. All the dogs are always happy to be at the beach. But all the dogs are not always trained to be around other dogs.

One afternoon, a group of small dogs runs out of a tall building. The building has a lot of balconies, and Humans sit in chairs and look at the waves and sand. The small dogs run up to me and circle me. They bark very loudly.

I am on my leash, but I lunge at them. My Human doesn't like that, but I don't like them barking at me. I keep lunging at them. My Human tries to move me further down the sand, but the dogs follow us and their Human isn't calling them back. They are not on leash and bark after me like the crows do when they chase the eagle in the sky.

My Human finally turns and yells, "Call your dogs!"

A Human calls to one of the dogs, but they keep circling and barking at me.

I smell my Human's frustration and anger at the dogs and their Human.

"Call your dogs," my Human yells again. She waves my ball stick at the dogs.

The dogs turn and run down the sand toward another dog. My Human yanks my leash, and we walk away from the crowded part of the beach.

We meet up with one of my dog pals, Hugo. I like to walk with Hugo because he never tries to take my ball and we get lots of treats from his Human. The Humans walk together, and I tell Hugo about the little dogs who circled me.

"Visitor dogs," Hugo says.

"What's a visitor dog?" I ask.

"Dogs who stay in the tall buildings with their Humans," Hugo says. "Some are nice. Some are not. Be careful when they greet you. Visitor dogs can hurt you."

The next day, we drive to a place with tall trees. We meet other Humans and their dogs for a walk. I love the woods. There is a dog park my Human takes me to where I can be off-leash and run through the woods. But I've never been to these woods. There are forest trails and a river. Some of the other dogs are off-leash, but my Human keeps me on my leash. "I know you, Stormy." She pets my head. "You love the woods. You run fast and will be gone. I don't want to lose you."

I don't want to get lost again either. One time at the Mom Human's house was enough.

Hugo stays on his leash too. We walk together. "This is where we walk when the sand is too crowded," Hugo says. "The local dogs walk here."

"What is a local dog?" I ask.

"A dog who lives at the sand with their local Human," Hugo says. "You are a local dog. I am a local dog. The dogs you met in the morning, on the sand near your house, are local."

"I don't live at the sand all the time," I say. "I have another home." It's all a little confusing to me. The Human, Merlynn and I ride in the car and go back and forth between the beach home and the one with my dog park.

"You are a local dog," Hugo says. "Trust me. I know."

I walk with Hugo and sniff the ground. It smells like birds and squirrels, moss, and damp earth.

But it also smells like the elk. Elk are local too. I don't want to run into them on our walk. I walk a little closer to my Human.

## SURGERY



**T**here is something on my neck. I try to lick it, but I can't get my tongue to the spot. I try to rub my neck against the chair, but my Human stops me.

"Stormy, you have a lump!"

"A lump?" It doesn't hurt, but it doesn't feel good either.

My Human spends a long time on the phone. She tells someone on the other end about my lump. I lie on the floor and place my head between my paws.

"You're going to have surgery." Merlynn jumps on the coffee table and stretches out. She licks one paw and then the other.

"What's surgery?"

"It's not good." Merlynn hops off the table and winds herself along the legs of the table.

My Human loads me into the car. She drives me to the place where I get my shots, and I stand very tall while the Fur Doctor ruffles my fur. He smells calm, and his hands are warm.

"Bring him in tomorrow morning," the Fur Doctor tells my Human. "No food or drink after midnight."

My Human gives me a special dinner. She makes chicken and cuts it up and places it with my food. Merlynn meows a lot. She wants her special food in a can, but Merlynn is not having surgery the next morning. Surgery must be a good thing if I get all this special food.

That night, my Human doesn't sleep very well. I feel her beside me on the bed. She smells like worry and anxiousness. I try to press against her and tell her it will be okay.

When she gets up, she doesn't feed me breakfast. I don't even have my water bowl. I stare at her while she makes her coffee. I can tell she is trying to ignore me. I stare harder at her. She gives Merlynn her food, and I try to sniff for a stray morsel, but there isn't any on the floor. I look in Merlynn's cat box for her special treats, but the cat box is very clean.

I stand in front of my bowl and whine.

My Human ignores me.

I jump on the couch and stare at her more. Finally, my Human loads me in the car and takes me to the Fur Doctor. When we get there, she hands my leash to another Human and she leaves me!

The Human walks me to a crate, but I drag my paws on the slippery floor. It's not a zippy crate like mine, and the bars are metal and cold. I whine. But the Human gives me a shot and I fall asleep. I sleep for a long time and dream of chasing my ball in the sand and running on forest trails. When I wake up, I feel dizzy and fuzzy. I can't walk without bumping into the walls, and there is something big and clunky around my neck.

My Human is back. She picks me up and carries me to the car. She places me in the back seat and ties my leash to the back seat headrest. But I am so dizzy. I whine and howl.

My Human smells like worry and upset, but I can't stop howling. I am so dizzy. "Please, Human," I howl. "Make it stop."

When we get to the house, my Human carries me inside. Merlynn stares at me, but she is fuzzy too.

I whine.

My Human places me in my zippy crate. I curl up on my soft blankets and cushion. She lies beside the crate the way she did my first night. I close my eyes, but the dizziness doesn't go away, and my head is inside this big, clunky circle.

"It's okay, Stormy," My Human says. "I'm right here."

I keep whining and whining until the dizziness stops. By then, the dark has come. My Human moves to the couch. Merlynn lies on the table and watches me. She doesn't say anything, but she watches me all night. In the morning, she is still lying on the table watching me.

My Human lets me out of my zippy crate and brings my food bowls to me. I eat some of my breakfast. My stomach feels squishy, and there is something in the cheese treat my Human gives me. It crunches and makes a loud sound against my teeth. I taste bitter. I don't have time to spit it out because some of the nasty has slid down my throat.

I sleep the rest of the morning. In the afternoon, the dizzy feeling is gone and I am just tired. The cone around my head makes it hard for me to walk and I bang against the walls. When I go outside, it's hard to see the steps back



inside. The ball-thief dogs bark at me, but I don't bark. I just want to go inside and get into my bed.

My Human sets my soft bed beside the couch and I sleep. I eat more of my dinner and get more cheese with crunchy things inside.

Tonight, my Human doesn't sleep on the couch beside me, but I'm too sleepy from whatever the crunchy thing is to go to her bed. I curl into my soft cushion in my zippy crate.



When I wake up, I am hungry and not dizzy at all. I try to get out of my crate, but the clunky thing around my neck stops me and I flop back in my bed.

I whine and my Human appears.

"Take the cone off," I whine at my Human.

She doesn't listen, but I know she understands. "You have to leave it on, Stormy," she says. "You can't bite at your stitches."

My stitches?

After breakfast, my Human leaves in the car without me. I am sad not to go to the sand or forest trails. I bury my head into the cone.

Merlynn walks by me. She knocks against the cone.

"What are stitches?" I ask Merlynn.

She shrugs. "I don't know."

"What's the crunchy thing inside my cheese?"

"Medicine," Merlynn says. "Spit it out."

My Human returns and gives me cheese. I know the crunchy thing is inside, and this time, I eat around it and leave the crunchy thing on the floor.

"Stormy!" My Human scolds me.

"See," Merlynn says. "It's medicine."

My Human tries to open my mouth, but I keep it pried shut. She gives up and throws the crunchy thing in my bowl. I sniff it. It smells horrible and I walk away.

A few minutes later, my Human holds out her hand. Peanut butter! My favorite! I lick it all up. There is something in the peanut butter, but I can't tell what it is and I don't care. I love peanut butter!

"The Human tricked you," Merlynn says.

"I love peanut butter." I lick my lips.

"Medicine is inside the peanut butter," Merlynn purrs.

A few more days pass and I feel much better. I still have the cone on, but I've learned how to walk without bumping into the walls.

After five more sleeps, my Human takes me to the Fur Doctor and he takes the cone off. He uses scissors and snips something at my neck. My skin feels cold where my fur has been shaved, but I am myself again. No cone. No dizzy. No lump.

My Human takes me to the sand. She throws the ball for me and I run and run and run. The sand feels so good.

There are lots of Humans on the beach, but when I run up to them, they look at my neck and step away. No one pets me.

"What happened to his neck?"

"Surgery," My Human says. "He had a lump."

"He'll have a scar," the Human says. "Too bad. He's such a beautiful dog."

I smell anger on my Human and stand beside her. She leads me away from the Human. Further down the sand, small Humans play with buckets and shovels. They dig big holes in the sand, just like I do. I want to play and wiggle and pull at my leash. My Human unclips my leash from my collar. I wiggle over to the small Humans. I press against them and sniff their faces. I lick their cheeks and jump into their sand holes. The small Humans all giggle. They all pet me and hug me. No one says anything about my scar.

## GED CLASSES



The days are warm, and the light is longer than the dark. My Human leaves after my breakfast. She doesn't return until it is past time for my dinner and my stomach growls. I try to hold all my pee and poop inside. One day I leave a small puddle on the rug in Merlynn's bedroom.

"You should use my sandbox," Merlynn says. "I don't like wet puddles in my room."

I sniff Merlynn's sandbox and eat a tasty treat. I lift my leg and leave a few pee puddles on the outside of her box. I know I am not supposed to go pee in the house. I learned to go outside and do my business when I was a pup. But my Human is gone too long, and I can't keep it inside.

When my Human arrives home, she sprays the rug with the bottle she uses for Merlynn's throw-up. I am embarrassed about my accident and cower. But my Human doesn't scold me.

The next day, she lifts me into the car. I can't wait to see

where we are going! We don't drive for too long and park under a shady tree. She rolls down the window, and a cool breeze that smells of the ocean fills the car. The sea lions say, "Arp, arp, arp, arp." She unhooks my leash from the back seat headrest and shuts the door. I curl up with my back seat towel. The "arp, arp, arp" makes me feel less lonely, and I fall asleep.

I wake up when my Human taps the car window. I wiggle up and down. My pee needs to get out.

She clips my leash to my collar, and I hop out of the car. We walk on some woodsy trails, and I sniff. I lift my leg and let all my pee out. When I am done, my Human and I walk inside a building and onto a floor that makes my paws slip. We go into a big room, and I sniff everywhere. Lots of other Humans have been in this room. It's a room for Humans to learn lessons, just like my room where I learned to communicate with my Human.

My Human watches me very carefully to make sure I do not pee anywhere. I sniff under table legs and around a big desk. And then I find the couch. I jump up on the couch and snuggle into the pillows. "I'm going to take a nap," I blink at my Human.

She understands me and lies down with me. We snooze together, and when we wake up, the light has shifted lower in the sky but it's not dark yet. She leads me back to the car and gets my water bowl and fills it with my food. My Human thinks of everything! I eat my dinner, and then she pats the car back seat. I snuggle into the towel, and she leaves the window down. It's cooler now, and the sun is behind a building, so the car is dark. I sleep, and when I

wake up, she is back. She smells like other Humans and tired.

We drive home, and Merlynn is waiting for us outside on the porch. She meows and meows at us. She is not happy she has been left outside all day without her food.

"You didn't come inside this morning. This is what happens," my Human says in her scold voice.

Merlynn glares at me. "Where were you?"

"Taking care of our Human. She teaches other Humans lessons."

"I never go anywhere." Merlynn turns her back on me.

The next day, I go with my Human again. I wait in the car, and my Human rolls down the windows and the sea lions talk to me. "Arp, arp, arp."

This morning I am not so sleepy, and I talk back to the sea lions. "Bark. Bark. Bark."

Two Human faces appear at the window, and I wiggle at them. One Human tries to stick their hand through the window, but the space is not big enough. "Good dog," the Human says.

When my Human returns, we do not go inside the building and take naps together on the couch. We drive to a place where my Human gets food. It smells like chicken and mashed potatoes and gravy. My Human clips my leash to me and gets the big, soft blanket from the back of the car. We sit under a tree, and I share my Human's chicken.

When we are finished, we walk on woodsy trails, and I sniff an area where a lot of small Humans play on swings. A few of them want to pet me. My Human makes them sit beside me, and she makes sure they do not pull on my ears. I

sit very still and even lick a few of their faces when they get close enough. The little Humans smell like crackers and applesauce.

Afterward, my Human takes me back to the car and I settle into the back seat. She returns to the place where she parks the car under tall trees. The sea lions say, "Arp, arp, arp."

I know the routine and get ready for a nap while she goes inside the building with the shiny and slick floors.

When my Human returns, she drives us home. Merlynn waits for us inside the front door. She meows at my Human, and I go straight for her sandbox with tasty treats.

After Merlynn eats, she stretches across the floor and licks her paws. "It was garbage day," she says. "You missed barking at the trucks."

"I barked at the sea lions," I say.

"What are sea lions?" Merlynn asks.

I pounce at her. "Bark. Bark." I mimic the sea lions.

"Stormy!" My Human says, in her not happy voice, "Stop."

Merlynn smirks. "You got in trouble."

I lie down and place my head between my paws. I give my Human my best "I'm sorry" look.

She gets a treat from the jar and gives it to me.

Merlynn hisses at me and swishes her tail in my face.

We both know my Human loves me best.

## DOG FRIENDS



**M**y Human and I take a lot of walks on the sand. She throws my ball and I chase it. There are all kinds of good smells; logs with smells of fish and lots of other dogs. Most of the dogs are off-leash like me. They chase balls or each other. But I don't see these dogs more than once. They are visitor dogs. Sometimes we take walks in the forest, and I walk with my older dog friend, Hugo. He tells me the local dogs walk on the sand in the first daylight. My Human and I walk later in the day, usually when daylight is ending. Sometimes the ball thieves are on the sand, but we always walk the other way so they can't steal my ball. I miss seeing my dog friends from training school and want sand dog friends.

The next morning, I wake my Human up with lots of whines and barks. She pours her coffee into her mug and settles on the couch cushions. I bark at her and jump on and off the couch.



"What is it, Stormy?" She smells irritated. She likes her morning coffee and book time.

"Walk." I bark. The sun shines into our front windows. "Walk. Walk." I bark. I don't want to miss my local dog pals.

My Human understands me and dresses in her outdoor clothes. She clips my leash to my collar, and I pull her up the hill to the sand.

On the sand, I run toward Hugo. He walks behind four other dogs with their Humans.

When I reach him, I sniff a dog's butt. He is my age and sniffs me back. He doesn't place his paws on my back or try to steal my ball. Both of us have been to dog training school.

Another dog greets me and then runs down the sand, chasing his ball.

And then there is a puppy.

The puppy tries to get in my face. She doesn't listen when I stand tall and tell her that I don't want her paws on my back or in my face. After a couple of times of trying to place her paws on my face, I snarl and run after her. I grab her between the muzzle and shake her.

"Stormy!" My Human yells. She places my ball thrower between me and the puppy. I drop the puppy. I am only asserting my territory as the older dog. I am telling the puppy how to behave. But the Humans think I am an aggressive dog. I spend the rest of the walk on my leash.

The next morning, my Human and I go to the sand in the early light. When my Human sees the puppy, she clips my leash to my collar and won't let me play with my ball. We walk with the puppy and the other Humans and dogs far down the

beach. The Humans talk about a minus tide, and I wade in a lot of tide pools. The cold water feels good on my belly—especially in the spot that gets a little sore from the groomer. I am very tired at the end of the walk and sleep the rest of the morning.

The next morning, we go to the sand again. My Human lets me walk off-leash, as long as I don't bother the puppy. I run with the other dogs to the driftwood and sniff. We find Human food around burnt logs, and the Humans all yell at us to "leave it." We even find a dead bird. The puppy finds it first, and we all sniff and pee on it.

After our walk, my Human and I walk with the puppy and her Human down the gravel hill. Instead of turning right toward our house, we turn left with the puppy and her Human. We walk through some woods and up steps and into a house that smells like eggs and bread and chicken.

My Human drops my leash but doesn't take it off. The leash dangles around me as I explore. I find the puppy's bed and a soft toy. I grab the soft toy and sit under the table and chew a hole to pull out the stuffing. My Human catches me and yanks the stuffed toy away.

The puppy's Human gives me a bone that has raw meat. I only get raw meat bones after bad grooms! The puppy gets a raw meat bone too, and we have to sit very far apart from each other while we chew on our bones. If the puppy gets too close to me, I snarl. My Human moves me with her foot so I am not facing the puppy.

The Humans talk, and Human food smells drift all around me. I leave my bone and sniff my Human's legs. She doesn't get the hint that I want some of the eggs. But the puppy's Human understands me! She leans down and hands

me pieces of egg. I swallow it fast and wait for more. The puppy gets some too.

After a while, the Humans finish talking and eating. My Human leads me to the door and the puppy follows me.

I sniff the puppy. "I guess you will be okay."

## THE GIFT



**M**erlynn dashes into the house. She has something in her mouth. She runs to the corner of the room and drops it on the ground.

The creature moves.

"Aughh!" My Human screams. "Merlynn!"

Merlynn picks up the animal in her mouth and runs into the bathroom. She drops it under the counter where she eats and sprawls against the wall. She looks like she just won a big blue ribbon.

"What is it?" I sniff at the animal's tail. It's not quite dead, but it's not living either.

"A chipmunk," Merlynn purrs.

I've seen the chipmunks on the fence. They scurry up the tree and jump on the roof next door.

My Human leans down and scoops the chipmunk into one of my poop bags.

"She never appreciates my gifts," Merlynn says.

"Maybe you should try to bring her something that is still alive," I say.

"Perhaps." Merlynn eyes me as if she is considering the idea.

"I can help you," I say. I haven't caught one of the seabirds on the sand or one of the small birds in our yard. I can't even catch the chipmunks or squirrels, but I try every day.

"I don't think so." Merlynn walks around me and to the living room. She hops onto the table by the couch and pretends she is not interested in me.

I am always interested in her and sniff at her paws. She smells like the chipmunk.

Merlynn doesn't let me sniff too long. She hops off the table and walks back out the door. My Human leaves the big glass window door open so we can come and go. Both of us like the freedom. I spend a lot of time lying on the porch watching the birds. Sometimes Merlynn joins me.

But now, she struts into the yard. When she reaches the back part of the yard, she disappears into the bushes. I follow her and sniff everywhere she walks.

"Stop following me," Merlynn hisses. "You'll scare away the chipmunks. You are too big and noisy."

I sit down on my bottom. "I am not too big. I am just the right size." My Human tells me I am just the right size all the time. She says I don't take up too much bed or couch.

Something darts behind Merlynn, and she lies down on her stomach.

"I want to see!" I crash behind Merlynn and whatever is in the bushes is gone.

Merlynn jumps up and onto the fence. She looks down at me. "I'm going next door. You can't come." And she's gone, over the fence. I hear and smell her in the yard next door. I'm never allowed into that yard next door to us. We have two yards on either side of us. One is where the ball thieves live and the other is where a lot of different people visit. Dogs never visit that yard, only Humans. Sometimes we greet the people on our walk. I like when small Humans are visiting next door. Sometimes my Human smells angry or disgusted at the visiting people and shuts our blinds so we can't see them.

I lie on the porch and wait for Merlynn to return. It takes her a long time and I sleep.

When I open my eyes, Merlynn stands in front of me and a small mouse is in her mouth. She places it on the porch mat. The mouse is still living and it scurries off the porch. Merlynn follows it and picks it up with her mouth. She places it on the porch step. I try to sniff the mouse, but she hisses at me and shows me her claw paws.

Merlynn doesn't show me her claw paws very much, but when she does, I always step away.

"Merlynn." My Human stands at the door. She doesn't scream this time, but she smells irritated. She scoops the moving mouse into one of my poop bags and drops the mouse over the fence. She crumbles up the empty bag and sticks it in the trash can.

Merlynn dashes off the porch and hops onto the fence. She drops to the ground below, and I know she's going to finish the mouse off. The Human knows it too. She motions

for me to come inside and shuts the door so Merlynn can't come back inside with the dead mouse.

I stand at the window door and watch for her. When she returns with the mouse, I tell her, "You can't come inside."

Merlynn drops the dead mouse on the porch and lies beside it.

I feel sad for Merlynn.

The Human doesn't like her gifts.

## PET SHOP



**S**ome afternoons my Human and I walk to where all the Humans shop and eat when they aren't on the sand. We practice my dog school skills and I walk very slow as people pass us. I don't sniff their dogs, packages, or bags of food. Sometimes a dog will get too close to me and my Human shifts me to the other side of her. I smell fear in the dogs. Humans don't always know that unless a dog has been trained and socialized to be around crowded spaces, we can be very afraid.

We reach a dog bowl and I drink a lot of water. It's so nice the Humans leave bowls for dogs. A cool breeze blows from the water and sand, which is only a few paw steps away. When I am finished drinking, I pull on the leash. I want to go inside the store with all the dog smells. My Human always brings me to pick out my dog food. I spend a lot of time sniffing every bag. Some bags smell like chicken and beef. Others smell like pumpkin. It takes me a long time to sniff all



the bags lying on the shelves at my level! It's so thoughtful of the Humans to leave our food bags where we can sniff them.

When I am done sniffing all the food bags, I find the stuffed dog in the middle of the floor. It smells like a lot of other dogs' pee. I raise my leg, but my Human catches me and does the same thing she did in puppy training classes when I tried to pee on the castle; she shoos me away with a wave of her arms and a loud, "Don't, Stormy!"

My leash is wrapped around her waist in a long body sling so I can't move very far away from her in the store. We walk over to the toys that squeak, and I pull one out of the bin. It has stuffing inside and a squeaker, but before I can chew a hole, her hand comes down and grabs it. She tucks it under her arm. I hope it's going home with us. I have chewed my stuffed friend Santa to flat Santa, but he still goes everywhere with me.

We walk to a cool metal box. My Human pulls out a bag of raw bones with meat inside. I whine a little, but she tucks the raw bones under her arm with the stuffed friend. Other dogs come in the store, but they are not as good as I am. Some of them are on leashes that extend way out and the Humans can't control them. One big dog bounds over to me and snarls at me.

My Human turns her body and I go with her because I am attached to my leash across her body. It takes a long time for the other Human to rope in the big snarling dog, and they are quietly escorted out of the shop.

A small dog sniffs me, and I sniff back. This one is old, very old but very friendly. My Human knows their Human,

and they spend a lot of time talking in high-pitched voices and waving their hands around.

When we finally get to the counter, a Human hands me a peanut butter treat. I scarf it down. She hands me two more treats before she takes my new stuffed friend and raw meaty bones and places them in a bag for my Human.

Oso, a Lab, lumbers out from behind the counter. He sniffs me, but I know his scent. I smell Oso when I take my walks and we walk by his house. Oso lives on the other side of the ball-thief dogs. My Human spends a lot of time liking Oso's pictures on that little metal box she carries around. I don't know why she does that, because she sees him all the time. Oso takes morning walks every day and chases his ball in the creek. He has very good manners and never steals my ball, growls, or snarls at me.

"Why is your picture in the metal box my Human carries around?" I ask.

"I am on Instagram," Oso says.

"What's Instagram?" I ask.

"My Human posts my picture and lots of other Humans like me."

"I want an Instagram," I say. "I am magnificent!"

Oso studies me. "I think you would make a good Twitter dog."

"Twitter," I bark. "Like birds. I like birds."

Oso tells me to enjoy my new stuffed friend and raw bones. I wiggle and wag at him and we touch noses. "Thanks for the bird tip," I say.

My Human and I walk home. It's a long walk, and by the time we get home, I am exhausted. All that walking has worn

me out. Walking on the pavement is not the same as walking on sand. I can walk a long time on sand without getting tired.

I jump on the couch, and my Human gives me my new stuffed friend. He's a bird friend but I am too tired to make a hole and pull out the stuffing. I lie down beside my new friend and place my head on his softness. I close my eyes and dream of chasing birds tweeting on dog Twitter.

## SUMMER DAYS



The light slips through the bedroom window blinds and wakes me. I snuggle up to my Human and lick her face. She opens her eyes. "Stormy," she pets me. I give her more face licks.

She rolls over, and I hop off the bed and do my happy morning dance with little barks until she sits up. I grab one of her slippers and run into the living room. "Get up. Get up," I bark.

When she opens the window door, I dash out and bark at the birds. "Good morning, birds!"

Sometimes Merlynn sleeps on the porch at night. When my Human calls her to come in for the night, she hides. I smell her by the wood stack, but my Human can't see her. In the morning, she waits on the bench cushion for my Human to open the door and let her into her food.

After my breakfast, my Human attaches my leash to my collar. I pull her up the gravel hill. She unhooks my leash and I dash down the dunes. She throws my ball and I race as fast

as I can to catch it. I bring my ball back to her and she throws it again and again.

We meet up with my dog pals. We are a big pack this morning. A couple of the dogs don't walk with us all the time because their owners don't live at the sand full-time. Hugo tells me they are still locals, but they visit during the summer and on weekends. The puppy is growing and has long legs. Her Human calls her "Drizzle." I dash around Drizzle but won't let her catch me. The Humans laugh and give us treats.

We all race down the sand, chasing each other and jumping in tide pools by large sea rocks. We walk for a long time, way past the usual turnaround spot. The Humans call it minus summer tides. It's when the waves go very far away and open up lots of sand for us to run. We all get to be off-leash because the sand belongs to the Oregon State Parks and dogs can be off-leash as long as we are under voice control, which means we have to come when our owners call us.

Most of the time, we remain under voice control.

But sometimes we don't.

A Human walks by the water. She carries something in her hand. I am sure it is treats, just like my Human. I run up to her and dance at her feet. She doesn't look at me or give me anything from her hands. I bark and dance around her.

"Stormy!" My Human calls.

I ignore my Human. I want some of the treats the Human has in her hand.

I bark louder at the Human walking.

Suddenly, my Human grabs me and snaps my leash to my collar. She pulls me away from the Human.

I drag my paws in the sand and pull toward the Human.

"No!" My Human says.

I slump and follow her back to my dog pals and their Humans.

My Human keeps my leash on me until we are far away from the Human walking by the water. By the time she unclips my leash, I have forgotten about it and want to run with my dog pals.

We walk around a lot of tide pools where I jump in for small swims. Some of the tide pools have a lot of water. I don't like when my paws leave the sand and swim back to where I can touch sand again. My Human takes my picture as I sniff the sea stars. They smell like salt, sea, and wind. She spends a few more minutes pressing buttons on her small metal box. I hope she is posting my picture to the dog Twitter.

I run ahead of my Human and explore the rocks. There is a cave and I slip inside and sniff. Humans have been here. I smell their food, and a Human left a jacket with a few treats. I'm just about to stick my head inside the pocket when I hear my Human. "Stormy! Stormy!"

Her voice is frantic and worried. I dash out of the cave and run to her. "Bark. Bark. Here I am."

She pets me and clips my leash to me. "I thought I lost you," she says.

I walk beside my Human as we walk around small rocks and tide pools. She stops and takes lots of pictures with her small metal box. The water hits my paws.

"Tide is coming in," my Human says.

We turn around and she keeps me on my leash until we

are past the cave. My dog pals and their Humans are far down the sand. But it doesn't matter. All the local dogs are out for walks this morning, and I sniff each one in greeting. Most of the Humans give me treats. Even the ball thieves are out for a long walk on the sand. My Human makes sure my ball is tight in its throwing arm before we greet them. It takes us a long time to reach the dunes where we walk back up.

When we get home, Merlynn stretches across the porch. The sun makes her fur warm. She smirks at me.

I walk into the house and, after drinking a lot of water, hop onto the couch. I take a long nap.

After dinner, the sun still hasn't set and we take another long walk on the sand. But this time we walk across the small creek and along the part of the sand where all the visitors walk. My Human keeps me on my leash. I greet all the visitors and their dogs with a sniff and give the little Humans a lick. Everyone laughs at me. My Human takes more pictures and presses buttons on her small metal box. I am magnificent!

## GED FIELD TRIP



All summer, I travel with my Human to the place with the sea lions. "Arp. Arp. Arp." She teaches her class, and I wait in the car with the windows rolled down and cool breezes. I talk to the sea lions, and sometimes my Human and I nap on the couch. She always parks under a tree and leaves the windows down. The cool air fills the car, and I drink from the water dish in the car. And then one day, she doesn't drive to the place with the couch and sea lions. Instead, she drives to a big grassy space.

I get out of the car and sniff. People sit at tables with good-smelling Human food. Ducks swim in a lake, and little Humans float on rafts. I am so excited! I wiggle and pull on the leash.

My Human gets a bag out of the car and a big blanket. We walk to the tables and everyone greets my Human.

"This is Stormy." She introduces me.

I wiggle and sniff them. I know some of their smells! These are the Humans who visit the room where we nap on



the couch! They leave behind smells of sweat, happiness, and sometimes struggle. School is hard for Humans too!

I sniff under the table while the Humans talk. But I am not the only dog here. There is another little dog. This dog sniffs me and barks in a high-pitched yip bark. I try to sniff him, but he yips louder.

"Stop it!" His Human picks him up.

My Human tugs at my leash and I step back to her. She places her foot on the leash and I sit. She hands me a treat. It's not nearly as good as all the food smells on the table.

"Please." I plead with my Human. "I want Human food!"

"Oh, Stormy," My Human sighs. "We have lost all our training skills." She slips some chicken under the table, and I eat it fast.

The little dog yips at me, but his owner places him on the other side of her leg so he can't see me. My Human gives me more chicken.

The Humans talk and laugh. My Human releases her foot on my leash and I nose my way along the edges of the table. Sometimes a hand reaches down and gives me chicken.

The Humans sit at the table for a long time. They write in journals. They paint pictures and they talk. Everyone smells very joyful.

After a while, my Human stands and pulls me from under the table. We walk to the water and I sniff. I don't like to drink the seawater of the ocean, but this is not seawater and I take big drinks. When I am finished, we return to the table. My Human packs up her bag.

"Bye, Stormy!" Everyone pets me.

I wiggle and a few Humans even take pictures of me!  
We go back to the car and drive home.

Merlynn waits for us on the porch cushions. "The neighbor fed me," she smirks. "I pressed my face against her glass window, and she came out with a can of my favorite wet food."

"You had a picnic too." I dance around her. "Just like me."

"What's a picnic?" Merlynn licks one paw.

"A picnic is where the Humans bring all their food outside. They have chicken and hamburger and crunchy chips." I lick my lips. Human food is amazing.

Merlynn licks her other paw and ignores me. She doesn't like when I know things she doesn't.

"Arp. Arp." I bark like the seals.

Merlynn dashes away from me into the bushes.

## FALL ON THE COAST



**I**n the middle of the night, I smell them. The dark and dank scent. I cuddle against my Human in the pillows and covers. I lift my head and stare toward the bedroom window. They are out there. The creatures who smell.

Elk.

I bury my nose against my Human and I only smell her.

In her sleepy state, she pets me. "Shhh...Stormy," she says my name. "It's okay." I snuggle closer to her.

In the morning, I leap out of bed. I retrieve my Human's slippers, and she serves my breakfast. Now that all the sand visitors are gone and it's not so crowded, my Human and I meet up with my dog pals on the coffee shop porch. Muffin and bagel crumbs land on the floor. My dog pals and I bump against each other in the dash for crumbs under the tables.

After coffee, my Human works on her computer, and I snuggle beside her on the chair. After a while, I get bored. I use my best pleading whine and she clips on my leash. On

our walk, I smell the dank and dark creatures. They are at the top of our hill. I lunge toward them. Most turn away, but one stares at me. Slowly, it takes a step toward me.

My Human tightens my leash. We run down the hill to the park. The scent of elk is all around us.

We pass by the creek. When we are far enough onto the beach, my Human slips off my leash. She throws my ball and my feet dance on the sand. When I get tired, we walk home. The dank, dark smell is gone.

That afternoon, the man in the big truck comes to the door. He hands my Human a box and like always, there is a treat for me. I wiggle and wiggle. I love the man in the big truck.

After dinner, my Human and I meet my dog pals at the end of the street for a beach walk.

Beach-walking Humans always have treats. I like to walk by their sides. Hugo always walks with me. The puppy, who is much bigger, runs into the dunes and sniffs for Human food. She gets in trouble a lot and her Human chases her. I whine at the Humans until a treat finds its way out of a bag and into my mouth.

After the sun sets, Humans and dogs walk down the hill.

I smell them again.

The dark, dank creatures.

They are close.

Very close.

One of my dog pals is off-leash. She dashes into the trees. The twigs snap. The dark, dank creatures are everywhere. My dog pal barks at them. She barks and barks.

Her Human calls to her. But she doesn't come.

The elk lifts his leg to smoosh my dog pal.

The Humans all go silent.

I smell it.

Fear.

And then, I hear.

My Human is calling. A high-pitched voice that she learned at our puppy training classes. The Trainer Human told her to use that call if I ever ran into the road. She told her I would stop and come back immediately.

It works for elk too.

Suddenly, my dog pal runs out of the bushes and toward the Humans.

The dark, dank creatures clomp into the woods. Their scent lingers in the air.

I am happy to walk back to the cottage beside my Human. My Human is magnificent. At bedtime, I snuggle next to my Human.

Tonight, the dark, dank creatures do not pass by my house.

## MY LEG HURTS



The days at the sand pass and turn into years. My favorite days are summer. In the morning, my Human and I meet my dog pals for long walks to the little pools of water. In the afternoon, we walk on the forest trails. Afterward, I take a long nap, eat dinner, and take another walk on the sand. My Human likes to sit on the logs and watch the sunset. I sit beside her and smell bonfires, Human food, and other dogs on the sand. By the end of my seventh summer, my back leg aches at night. Sometimes I limp and my Human rests me from all sand walks.

But I still race out the door and chase the birds in my yard. I dodge the bushes and hurl myself over a small wall that separates the bushes from the grass. The twinge inside my left back knee shoots sharp pain up my leg. I carry my bent leg under me and hop back to the porch. The stairs are a little tricky and I'm panting with pain when my Human lets me inside.

"Stormy!" she says. "What happened?"

I try to dance around in my "happy-to-see-her wiggle dance," but it's hard on three legs.

"You have to rest," she says. "No beach walks for you this weekend."

I spend the weekend lying on the couch. It's low enough I can jump up with three legs and plop against the pillows. Merlynn walks by on the carpet. Her tail brushes my leg. "You shouldn't have jumped off the wall," she purrs.

I sleep a lot during the day. After a few sleeps have gone by, my Human takes me to the sand. I want to run and play, but my leg isn't listening to me. My Human doesn't let me walk very far, and we sit down on a piece of driftwood.

A little Human builds sandcastles. I hobble toward her and try to do my wiggle dance on three legs.

"This is an older dog," the adult Human says. "He's much older than we thought."

"He's not old," my Human tells them. "He hurt his leg."

I try to stand tall. I am not old. The days have passed since my puppy school days, but I am not old like Hugo. I am seven. Seven is not old.

In the morning, my Human loads me into the car and we go to the place where I get my shots. Sometimes Merlynn comes with us and gets her shots too. But she is not with us today. My leg hurts after I have been sitting in the car and I hobble on three legs.

My Fur Doctor comes into the room. I like him. He always smells calm and his hands are strong. But I can't greet him very well. The slippery floor is hard for me to balance on three legs.

My Fur Doctor presses my leg.

I yelp.

"Surgery," he tells my Human.

When we get home, I take a rest. After I sleep, my Human and I drive to the sand to watch the sunset. My Human drops my ball to the ground. I pick it up and do a little dance. My leg is not so stiff and I'm not holding it under me. But I don't let my foot touch the ground.

My Human doesn't play this game for very long, and I hobble back to the log.

"I took his picture," a Human says. "He's so cute."

She holds out her square box to my Human. I can tell I am inside that square box in a lot of different poses. I wiggle as much as I can. Everyone always likes to take my picture. I am magnificent.

But my Human smells sad.

That night, I have a hard time sleeping. My leg aches, and I don't want to sleep with my Human and jump off to the floor. I land with a thump on all three legs. I spend most of the night getting up and trying to find a place that doesn't hurt my leg.

In the morning, there is no breakfast. I whine and plead with my Human. Merlynn gets her breakfast and I try to sniff out some morsels. But there are none on the floor this morning. I finally give up trying to tell my Human I need my breakfast and go sit in the chair. I place my head on the armrest and look very sad. My stomach growls and growls. She has forgotten to feed me.

My Human places my leash on my collar and helps me get into the car. I sit on the blanket and whine for a treat. She always gives me a treat when I ride in the car. But



today, there aren't any treats, just like I didn't get my breakfast.

We go to the Fur Doctor and one of the Humans that smells like medicines takes my leash. She tells my Human they will call her after surgery. I smell the worry and fear on my Human.

"No," I pull toward my Human. "I want to stay with you. I don't want to go with them."

But it does no good. I am placed into a crate. I am given a big shot. I dream of curling up in bed, close to my Human.

When I wake up, my leg hurts and I am very dizzy. The Human gives me another shot, and I can't feel my leg. The Human opens the crate and helps me out. I wear a plastic cone around my head. The Human picks me up in a towel and takes me out to the bright room. I smell my Human, and she places me in my Human's arms. My Human is with one of my dog friend's Humans. My dog friend's Human tries to give me a treat, but I don't want it today. The Earth is swirling.



My Human gets in the back seat with me, and my dog friend's Human drives the car. My Human holds me as the car moves. It makes me feel a little bit better with her beside me, but I still whine and cry. I feel very confused from the medicine.

When we get to my house, my Human carries me out of

the car. She brings me into the living room and sets me inside my old zippy crate with a new big plush bed. I try to lie down, but the dizziness takes over and I whine and cry. My Human lies down on the floor beside me, like when I was a puppy, and pets me. She keeps petting me all night.

When the sun starts to come up, I need to go pee. I cry very loud, and my Human helps me out of the mesh crate. But I can't walk. She tries to pick me up but jostles my leg and it hurts. I cry out in a sharp cry.

She cries out in a sharp cry like mine. "I'm sorry, Stormy," she says. "I'm sorry. I don't know what to do."

She is crying, and seeing her cry makes me stop crying.

My Human reaches into my zippy crate and helps me stand on three legs. Together we hobble down the three-deck stairs. I try to pee, but nothing will come out. It's hard to raise my leg when I can't stand on one of them. I don't pee, and my Human helps me back up the stairs. I lie down in the new soft bed.

"Cheese?" My Human waves my favorite cheese in front of my nose.

I am not hungry and keep my lips closed.

Merlynn sits on the coffee table. Her eyes are very wide.

I am too dizzy to talk to her.

I close my eyes and sleep. I still need to go to the bathroom. In my dreams, I pee and pee and pee. When I open my eyes, my new bed is wet and smells like my pee.

My Human doesn't scold me. She rolls off the couch and takes off my bed's cover. She makes me a new bed in my mesh crate from her blankets and pillows. It smells like her and it's almost like being in her bed. I get back inside my

mesh crate and close my eyes. I sleep and the dizzy feeling is gone.

When I wake up, my bowl of food is next to me. I nibble at a morsel, but the clunky cone gets in the way of getting into my dish. My Human replaces my plastic, hard cone with a soft cone that smells like the dog across the street.

While I eat, my Human is very busy on her square box. She is typing and talking. "Everyone is asking about you," my Human says. "They want to know you are okay after your big surgery."

Merlynn sits down by the door. She stares at me. She doesn't ask to go out at all.

My Human gives me three pieces of my favorite cheese. They all have the medicine wrapped inside, but I eat the cheese anyway. After a while, I am very sleepy and get back into my soft bed. I keep my left leg stretched out of the bed. My Human has replaced all the soft bed covers and it smells very clean. She lies on the couch beside me and pets me over and over. The medicine makes me very tired but not dizzy.

When I wake up, my Human helps me outside. This time, I pee. When I am done, she helps me walk back inside. I get more food, but this time only one piece of cheese with medicine. I'm not sure what to do now. It should be time to play with the ball; hide and seek or roll it under the table or couch and make my Human get it for me. But the ball is nowhere to be found, and there isn't anything for me to play with.

I am also trapped. My Human has made a big box wall with the furniture. My zippy crate is in the middle, and my

food bowls are by the table. I lie down in my bed, but I am not sleepy. I look at her. "Play?"

"No, Stormy," she says. "You have to rest. Twelve weeks of rest."

I place my head on my bed's thick, soft side and whine.

My Human stares at me.

Merlynn stares at both of us. I'm not sure what game we are playing, but I don't like it.

## RECOVERY



I 'm bored. My Human confines me to the small square space in the living room by placing the tables in a square without an exit for me. I lie in my new plush bed for hours. Merlynn sits at the door and swishes her tail. My Human walks to the door and Merlynn bounds outside without a look back at me. I whine. I want to chase the birds too.

"I know, Stormy," my Human says. "But you need to rest."

I plunk down in my plush bed, place my head between my paws and give her a very sad look. The only time I get to move out of this square space is at night. My Human moves my bed to the side of hers. She shuts the bedroom door, and I can't wander the house. My leg aches at night and I move between my bed and the bathroom floor mat. The soft cone bumps against the floor and my neck.

My Human gives me chicken with medicine that stops the ache.

She fills peanut butter inside toys, and I work at licking all the peanut butter from the insides.

But I am still bored.

In the afternoon, my Human leaves for a while. When she returns, I smell the ocean and sand on her. I am sad she walked on the sand without me.

When Merlynn comes inside, she stretches across the table. I smell the warm sun on her. Some days she stretches across the deck and watches the birds. I want to lie on the deck, but my Human keeps me in the square space with my plush bed.

I am tired of sleeping in my plush bed. I want to be on the couch, tucked into the pillows. But every time I try to jump on the couch, my Human stops me with her hand. And then, she is not watching. She is in the kitchen making more chicken. I place my paws on the couch and push very hard off the floor. I can only use one leg and it's much harder to jump.

"Stormy!" My Human rushes over from the kitchen. "No!"

I eye her and collapse back into my soft bed. I will try again.

The next morning, my Human leaves me in the plush bed in the living room square while she takes a shower. The water runs, and Merlynn meows for the water faucet to be turned on.

I eye the couch again. This time I am going to make it. It takes me two tries, but my Human isn't here to stop me. By the time she is done with her shower, I am buried into the

pillows in my usual spot. I blink my eyes at her and give her my best dog smile.

She shrugs her shoulders. "I guess if you made it up there, you can stay."

After that, I only sleep in my plush bed at night. The rest of the time, I burrow into my couch spot.

At night, I lie in my plush bed beside my Human's bed. Merlynn scratches the chair. I can't get out of bed and chase her away, and the arm of the chair frays. My Human tosses a blanket over the chair at night, but Merlynn moves the blanket. Scratch. Scratch. Scratch.

Finally one day, my Human helps me get into the car. My leg doesn't hurt at all, and we take a car ride to the Fur Doctor. He greets me like I am his old friend, but I know better. I hold my leg in the air and use my other three legs to hop away.

The Fur Doctor uses a clipper around my leg to take out stitches. He removes my soft head cone. I've gotten so used to seeing only straight ahead of me. It takes me a minute before I realize I can see my Human out of the corner of my eyes now! I hop and wiggle to her.

"Careful," the Fur Doctor tells my Human. "This is where it's going to get hard. Stormy still needs ten weeks of recovery. He has to learn to walk again on his leg. If he has too much time running around, he will put too much weight on his other leg and that knee will go out."

My Human attaches my leash and I hobble on three legs out the door.

My Human lifts me into the car and pats the green towel in the back seat. I drop to a heap because I can't stand on the

soft seats and balance on three legs. She smiles and hands me three small treats. "Good dog, Stormy," she says.

I stay lying on my stomach the whole ride home, not because she keeps tossing treats over her shoulder but because I really can't get up and stand on three legs with the moving car. I don't tell her this because I don't want the treats to stop coming.

When we get home, Merlynn lies across the porch in the sun. I am much faster now on three legs, and I surprise her when I reach her and sniff at her. "I'm home."

"Mmm.." She sniffs and moves away from me. "You smell like the Fur Doctor."

Merlynn doesn't go to the Fur Doctor as much as I do. She goes once a year for shots. I go a lot for my ears, eyes, and now my leg.

The trip to the Fur Doctor has made me very tired, and I am happy to get into my plush bed and close my eyes. My stomach wakes me a few hours later, but today there is no chicken.

"The medicine is done," my Human says. "No chicken."

After dinner, my Human clips my leash onto my collar. She opens the front door and I hobble down the steps. I pull toward the grassy area across the street. All the cats who live in the neighborhood pee on that grass. I always like to leave my scent.

After I am done leaving my scent, my Human walks me past two houses. But instead of our usual walk down the street and toward the puppy-who-is-now-a-dog's house, my Human turns around and we walk back. I am panting hard.



It's hard to walk on three legs. When we get to the stairs, I need a little help climbing them.

"You're back already?" Merlynn jumps off the balcony ledge of the deck. "You barely went anywhere."

"I'm tired."

I plop into my plush bed. I stay there for the rest of the evening.

We repeat the small walk every night. Every afternoon, we walk down the street. We go further and further every day.

The rains arrive and pound on the ceiling, and Merlynn stays inside more. She sits on the window ledge and watches the rain. Sometimes the elk walk by. I smell them outside our house.

"Are you ever afraid of the elk?" I ask Merlynn.

She raises her face into the air and sniffs. "No."

But I know she is lying. I have seen Merlynn run inside when the elk are on the hillside behind our house. She heads for the back bedroom and disappears under the bed for a while.

As the rainy days pass, we take longer walks. My Human walks me up the big hills to the beach. We stand at the top and look down at the sand.

And then one day, we walk up and down the dunes and my leg strengthens and strengthens. It's a good workout, and each time I get stronger.

Finally, when the houses sparkle with bright lights and the fake tree is in our living room, my Human takes me to the sand. I sniff all the driftwood, and I pee everywhere. I have returned to the sand again!

# THE ITCHY BUGS



**S**cratch. Scratch. Something is biting me. I rub my back leg against my belly as hard as I can.

"Fleas," Merlynn hisses as she scratches her ears.

"Make it stop." I scratch.

"You brought them home." Merlynn keeps scratching.

I didn't bring the itchy bugs home. Merlynn sleeps in the bushes and the deep dirt around our house. She brought the itchy bugs home. I don't think the itchy bugs jumped on me from the sand.

My Human opens the cabinet and pulls out a small tube. She pops it open, and it smells like medicine. I back away. But it's not me she's coming after. I smell determination and she grabs Merlynn by the scruff of her neck. Merlynn twists, and the Human squirts something that smells stinky onto the back of Merlynn's neck.

Merlynn hops away, and the back of her fur is wet.

My Human doesn't give me any of the smelly neck medicine.

"You didn't get any wet medicine?" Merlynn licks her paws.

I sit down and scratch my belly. "I eat cheese bites with crunchy medicine in it all the time. I don't need more medicine."

After a few sleeps, the bugs stop jumping on Merlynn. But they stay on me. The little bugs jump around, and at night, they jump in my face and my ears. I bat them away and wake up scratching. In the day, the itchy bugs bury themselves into the couch cushions and attack me when I take my afternoon naps.

I scratch a lot.

My fur is long and scraggly because I couldn't see the Fur Cut Human while my leg healed. When my Human finally takes me for my fur-cut, I get a horrible-smelling bath. The Fur Cut Human keeps her lips tucked inside her mouth; the way Humans look when they are not happy about something. I smell disgust the whole time my fur is cut. She cuts my fur very short and I am shivery.

When my Human picks me up, she spends a long time talking to the Fur Cut Human. The Fur Cut Human gives her a bottle of the smelly shampoo and a big comb. I hate the big comb. It makes my skin hurt.

The itchy bugs attack me. My Human places me in the bathtub and tries to pretend she's the Fur Cut Human. She squirts cold shampoo on my fur, and I squirm. I dig my claws into the tub. My paws slip and slide and I go nowhere, but my Human gets very wet. She dribbles the smelly shampoo all over me and rubs. It tickles, and when she reaches under me and rubs my belly, my legs twitch in

response to her tickles. She finally gives up and fills cups of water and dumps it over me. I don't mind until she gets near my head and ears, and then I shake and water flies everywhere.

My Human lifts me out of the bathtub. She is as wet as I am when she places me on the bathroom floor. I shake, and water drenches the walls, toilet, and floor. She drops a towel over me, but I wiggle and shake it off.

My Human opens the bathroom door, and I streak into the living room and rub myself against the side of the couch. I get the couch all wet.

Merlynn steps inside, sees me, and leaves. Merlynn does not like bathwater.

The itchy bugs stop for a few days, and I don't wake up in the middle of the night scratching myself. But they are still hopping in the couch cushions, jumping on me.

After a few sleeps, we visit Mom Human, and I bring the itchy bugs with me. Mom Human has a cat. Neuma is a big, fluffy cat. We were friends when she was a young cat, but now she is a grown cat and doesn't like me. Neuma watches me from a chair and bats her claw paws at me. Sometimes her claw paws attack my face. I yelp, and my Human and Mom Human use loud voices at each other.

At night, Neuma sleeps in a big room all by herself. She climbs on top of a tall carpet post and sits. I like Neuma's toys, especially her mice. I chew on one while Neuma stares at me from her tall post. My Human finds me and takes the mice, but Neuma has more toys than me. She has two baskets with lots of stuffed toys and small balls and more mice. I grab one of the stuffed toys and pull out the stuffing

while my Human makes my breakfast. Mom Human finds the flat toy and there are more loud voices between my Human and Mom Human.

I visit Mom Human and Neuma for two sleeps. I bark on the deck. I run around the big yard and make agility courses. My Human smells like worry every time she opens the door and I race out, but my leg is better and I run and run.

The itchy bugs multiply and burrow into the bed where the Human and I sleep.

When we leave, Neuma itches her ears. One of the itchy bugs hops alongside the edges of her fur.

"Bye, Neuma," I wiggle. "I hope you like the itchy bugs!"  
I hop into the back seat of the car and scratch.

# SMALL HUMANS



**A**t home, I keep scratching. My Human gives me another bath, but the itchy bugs keep attacking me. My Human also starts itching her ankles.

After a couple of sleeps, my Human takes me to the Fur Doctor.

We sit in a big room with a lot of window doors. Dogs and Humans wait on the other side of the window doors in small rooms. One dog lies on the ground. I can smell he is no longer in his body. Three Humans gather around the dog. The dog spirit hovers just above the Humans, but the Humans can't see it. The spirit is happy. He had a great life with the Humans sitting beside his body.

I scratch. My Human gives me a sharp tug on the leash to make me stop scratching. One of the itchy bugs jumps off to a dog waiting beside me.

A Human leads us into one of the window door rooms. Humans cry next door to us, and sad smells drift into our room. I lie on the floor and stare out the window doors at

the Humans and dogs who are in the waiting room. A Human sits on the bench with a big box. I smell puppies in the box and their sharp cries fill the air. It's like my puppy classes where there are so many dogs and Humans. I love all the activity!

"I want my dog back," the small Human in the room next to us cries. Sad swarms into our room and I stop wagging. I sit very still and listen. I want to go to the small Human, press against his side, and comfort him. But there is a wall between us.

Our door opens and the Fur Doctor gives me a treat. I wiggle and wag and take the treat from him.

He rubs his hands over my leg and nods his approval. "There's a little bit of arthritis in the leg," he says. "Make sure Stormy takes some supplements."

I'm not sure what arthritis is, but my Human doesn't smell like fear or worry the way she did when I came for my surgery. I know whatever it is, she is not worried about it, which makes me happy.

Humans walk past our window door. The small Human next to us cries, "I want my dog back."

My Human's sadness seeps into me. I press against her. "It's okay," I tell her. "I'm here."

She pets me, and the Fur Doctor says I am good to go.

We walk to the counter. I stand beside my Human but face the room. I like to greet all the dogs who come in. The cats are in their cages, and all of them smell afraid. Cats don't like going to the Fur Doctor. Some dogs don't like Fur Doctor trips either, but this Fur Doctor sits down on the floor and pets us. He talks to us in a soothing voice. His

hands always find what hurts us. Most of the dogs don't smell afraid.

My Human takes something from the Human at the counter and we leave. When we get in the car, she unwraps the box and tells me in that voice, "I have a treat for you, Stormy."

I am not dumb. I know she has medicine.

But she gives it to me with two of my dog treats and I eat everything.

"It will make you stop itching," my Human says.

On the way home, we stop at the sand where I once learned to catch my ball and Mom Human gave me Human food for the first time. My Human throws my ball and I run hard. When I reach it, I dive for it. My leg twists, but it doesn't hurt. I run back to my Human with my ball in my mouth.

She takes my ball and sticks it in her pocket.

I dance around her and whine. I want my ball! Let's play the ball game!

"No, Stormy," she says, "Running after your ball will reinjure your leg."

I run down the beach, and when I get too far, she calls me and takes treats from her pocket. Once I figure out there are a lot of treats in her pocket, I stick close to her. She has learned from our dog-walking Human pals to carry treats in her pocket! I am so excited and wiggle and wiggle beside her, waiting until the next treat falls from her pocket. I know they are really my dog food morsels, but I don't care. I love treats on the sand! I don't even miss playing with my ball.

When we get home, Merlynn lies on the porch step. I



smell the cats who live across the street on her. She doesn't like the neighbor cats and sometimes there is a lot of hissing. Merlynn does not need a cat pack like I need dog pals. But one of the cats likes her and he visits a lot. He is a young cat. When he visits, Merlynn walks to the middle of the street and rolls around in the gravel. "I am the Queen," she tells the neighbor cat. "You must obey me." The neighbor's cat runs away from Merlynn.

"Another trip to the Fur Doctor?" Merlynn purrs as she follows us inside.

"The itchy bugs are gone," I wiggle around her.

"Mmmm..." Merlynn eyes the back of my fur. "I just saw one jump. I think you might need to go back to the Fur Doctor."

But Merlynn is wrong. The medicine I took stops the itchy bugs. They leave the couch and my bed. I stop scratching.

That night, Merlynn throws up in the hallway. I hear her retching, and my Human gets up and wipes it up. She is grumpy when she comes back to bed.

Merlynn hops onto the bed and stretches out on the pillow beside my Human.

I press my nose against her and smell sickness.

"You need to go to the Fur Doctor."

"I'm fine," Merlynn purrs.

But I smell the sickness inside her. Something is inside Merlynn and smells very bad.

## ELK AT THE SAND



**I**n the winter, the wind gusts at our house, and the rains pour hard on the windows. Sometimes my Human and I get caught in the rain on our walks, and it makes me shivery. My Human buys a special scarf for me from the dog store and wraps it around my neck to keep me warm. We take lots of pictures of me in my scarf. My Human shares it with my virtual friends on dog Twitter. Many Humans give my picture hearts. I am magnificent!

Today on our walk, small clumps of elk poop line the gravel hill to the sand. I never eat elk poop. It smells bad. When we get to the dunes, the elk stand in a herd of at least fifteen. My Human keeps me close to her on the leash. The elk have babies, and an elk with horns turns and takes a step toward us. I smell my Human's fear and we run down the dunes, away from the elk and onto the sand. I'm the only dog on the sand and she's the only Human.

The wind whips my ears behind my face and the sand

flies in my eyes. We walk toward the end of the beach and cold rain falls from the sky.

I hear the elk behind us. They run down the grassy dunes and dance on the sand just like dogs. Except they are not dogs. They are elk. A herd of them in all sizes. Elk with big antlers, medium-sized elk, and baby elk. My Human grabs my collar so I can't run away, and the elk advance toward us.

She clips the leash to my collar and we run. We run so fast that I didn't know she could run that fast. We run up into the dunes. We don't stop until we are at the top of the dunes. The elk smell isn't so strong here, and the elk don't notice us. My Human breathes hard. She is shaking and her fear smell is all around us. I stand very still beside her.

We stand for a long time watching the Elk trot on the sand. They reach the end of the sand and climb up on the rocky hillside trail. When the elk are gone, my Human and I walk out of the dunes. We are at the other end of our gravel road street, near where Drizzle, the puppy-now-adult dog lives. I whine and pull on the leash. I don't want to see Drizzle. I want to get a treat from her Human. Her Human has the best dog treats, crunchy and meaty!

But the elk cluster at the end of Drizzle's driveway. My Human and I turn the other way, and she walks in a very fast walk. The elk stay at Drizzle's driveway and eat the bushes.

We reach our house and Merlynn greets us at the door. "The elk were here," she meows. "Outside. They ate the roses."

Merlynn likes the roses. She likes to lie in the dirt, under the roses, while my Human gives the roses a branch cut.

Sometimes she bats her claw paws at the branches. I never get to sit in the front and help my Human play in the dirt. I always have to wait in the backyard.

My Human unclips my leash and picks up my food bowl. I eat my dinner and chase Merlynn around the house. I have a lot of energy because I didn't get my walk on the sand. Merlynn hisses at me and bats her claw paws. I pounce at her.

After a while, my Human sighs and clips my leash back onto my collar. But this time, we don't go to the sand. We walk down the street, and I sniff the bushes and grass. When we reach the park with the Human bathrooms, we walk past the smelly man's house who once came to visit. His house smells like him, dank and dark and musty. I didn't like him and am glad he never came back to visit us. My Human leads me to a small pole with a faucet. A dog's bowl is under the faucet. She and I left the bowl at the park for other dogs to get water.

My Human fills the water bowl and I drink. When I am finished, we walk back through the streets to my house. The ball thieves bark as we get close to their house. I pull on my leash and bark at them.

Merlynn sits in the front window, watching us. When she sees us, she jumps off the ledge, and when my Human opens the door, she is waiting on the carpet for us. She slips past my Human onto the porch, but in a few minutes, she reappears at the back window door. Her face presses against the window door. "Meow. Meow."

I paw at the door and bark to let my Human know Merlynn needs to come in.

My Human opens the door and Merlynn streaks inside.  
I smell the elk in the air. I turn around and jump onto  
the couch and curl into the cushions. The elk are scary.

## IT WASN'T ME



One day, the Human stops taking me with her to get my food. Instead, a big box comes to our door and my dog food is inside. The box is delivered when we take our walks, and there is always a treat for me on the top of the box.

The Human also gets a box of her food that comes to our door.

My Human's friends don't come to our house anymore. We still walk on the sand with my dog pals but we don't go in the car for errands. And when she does leave the house, she wears a mask over her mouth and nose. She spends a lot of time talking to other Humans inside her box that sits on the table. I can hear their voices, but I can't smell them or see them. A lot of time they are young voices and she uses her explaining voice. I lie by the table and keep her company. Sometimes she talks about me and lowers her box so I can peer into it. The young voices squeal my name, but I can't

wiggle against them or smell them. It's all very confusing to me.

Finally, one afternoon the Human takes me to the dog shop where I can pick out a treat or two or three. She wears her mask over her nose and mouth, but I don't have to wear one. We spend a long time sniffing the jars with pig ears and bones and special treats. I get a pig ear to take home. Hugo and Drizzle are at the dog shop too. They show their Humans around the store. The Humans all wear masks. Drizzle picks out a new collar, and Hugo sniffs for treats.

We lead our Humans outside to a porch by the shop. A Human gives me something very cold to eat. The cold makes my mouth hurt and I try to lick around the cold. It tastes like peanut butter, but it freezes the insides of my mouth. After a while, the cold treat melts into liquid all over the pavement. I don't want to lick it from the pavement and leave it on the ground.

When we finish eating the cold, melty treat, the Humans walk us to the park across the street. I smell the elk scent, but they aren't here now.

The Humans stand beside a small tree. They talk about the tree and don't see Hugo, who does his business which is smelly and runny. I leave a little pee beside it.

The Humans pull out poop bags. It takes three bags to scoop all the runny mess.

"Stormy!" Hugo's Human says.

"It wasn't me." I cower away from her and stand beside my Human. My Human knows my poops. My old dog friend is sick. I have smelled sick on him during our sand walks. He smells like medicine. It is not me. I do have a sensi-

tive stomach and sometimes have runny poops when the Humans give me treats that are too rich for me on our sand walks, but I wouldn't have pooped three bags of runny mess.

But I smell uncertainty on my Human.

I bark at her. "I squatted next to the runny poop mess and made my mark. But I don't have runny poops. I am not sick!"

My Human still smells uncertain.

"The ice cream must have upset his stomach," Drizzle's Human says.

"He doesn't usually have poops that big," my Human says.

"No, no. It wasn't me," I plead with her with my eyes. "Please. I don't need to go to the Fur Doctor. I don't need crunchy medicine!"

My Human walks me to the car, and I leap into the back seat. I am glad to leave my dog pals and their Humans. My Human takes off her mask and smells like relief.

When we get home, my Human picks up my poops from the yard. "Your poops look fine, Stormy." She stares at me.

"Yes," I bark. "I am fine! I feel fine! My poops are fine! They aren't runny and messy. They aren't big and fill three bags. They are round and somewhat hard. Just the way they should be!"

My Human shakes her head, and we go inside. She gives me a treat. "I think you got blamed for something you didn't do."

"Yes!" I bark at her. "I did!"



## MY EAR



**M**erlynn throws up at night. She leaves piles of throw-up on the hallway carpet, and she smells bad.

"You need to go to the Fur Doctor." I lie on the porch with Merlynn.

"I'm fine," Merlynn purrs.

But my Human loads Merlynn into her box and they go to the Fur Doctor. When they return home, Merlynn gets medicine in her food. She never eats it.

For a while, Merlynn doesn't act sick. During the day, she lies in the dirt and bats at bugs. Her appetite grows and she takes more food from my Human's plate. She always walks on the counter every time my Human cooks a meal. But she doesn't gain weight like me when I eat a lot of Human food.

"I'm hungry," Merlynn meows.

"You just ate," I say. "Wet food."

"I'm hungry," Merlynn meows louder.

My Human leaves her plate on the table and walks inside to get a glass of water.

Merlynn jumps onto the table and grabs a piece of chicken from my Human's plate. She eats three big chunks before the Human returns and scolds her.

Merlynn eats so much Human food that her tasty sandbox treats taste like Human food. I can't stay away from eating them, and my Human gets a new sandbox that has a cover. I work hard at getting my head inside the covered box. I'm not scared that my head is in the deep, dark box while my body is outside. It's like the tunnels where I used to find the treats in my puppy classes. Sometimes I knock the top off and my Human knows I have been in the box.

"Walk, Stormy?" My Human says.

I run around in circles. Merlynn appears and I pounce at her. "I'm going for a walk!"

"I'm hungry," Merlynn meows at my Human's legs.

My Human goes into the kitchen and gets a can of Merlynn's wet food. She opens the can, and this makes Merlynn meow even louder until she places the smelly food in Merlynn's bowl.

My Human attaches my leash to my collar. My Human and I don't take as many walks anymore. I always need long naps after the walks. We don't always walk on the sand with my dog pals either. I get tired walking up the gravel hill. We take a lot of car rides to the other parts of the sand where I don't have to walk so far.

My Human walks me to the back of the car and I hop in. Sometimes my leg drags a little bit and she has to help me. She ties my leash to the back seat headrest, and she gets into

the front seat. I whine until she reaches into the treat bag and pulls out a treat. I wiggle, and we are off.

Today, she takes me to the sand with the big rock. I love the Humans who are at the big rock! One Rock Human always gives me treats. Sometimes she comes to visit us. The Rock Human has a big dog; I can always smell a big dog on her legs. I always walk on my leash by the rock. I sniff the little pools with water in them, but my Human never lets me step into them at this part of the sand.

I sniff by the rock. Lots of Humans always want to pet me here too. "He's so cute," they say while I wiggle around them.

We walk to the side of the rock, where I rest. My Human stares at the birds flying around the rock. I lie beside her and smell the Humans and birds and sea and sand. It's a great place to smell.

"Oh look!" My Human says. "There is a spaniel like you!"

It's not a Cocker Spaniel like me. It's a Springer Spaniel and the dog smells scared, but the Humans smell nice. I pull on the leash toward the Humans.

The dog snarls at me and grabs one of my ears. It bites down hard and I yelp. "My ear! My ear!"

I shake my head as my Human yanks the leash and pulls me away from the dog. The Humans are having harsh and angry words. I jump around yelping, and blood flies all over the sand.

My Human kneels beside me and gets water from the small pools. She tries to wash my ear, but it stings and I twist away from her. I stop yelping.

My Human walks me to the truck with wheels where I

get treats from the Rock Human with the big dog smells. But she's not here today and we leave. Spots of blood drop behind me.

My Human smells worried and scared. We walk very fast. My ear stings just a little, but it bleeds a lot.

When we get to the car, my Human tries to wipe the blood off my ear. It has mostly stopped, but I won't let her get close. We go home and I find my spot by the wall.

"Your ear is bleeding," Merlynn sniffs me.

I growl at her. "Leave me alone." My ear leaves small spots of blood on the floor.

My Human talks to someone on her small box to her ear. When she is finished, she clips my leash to my collar. We walk to the car, and she helps me inside. A few splatters of blood land on my blanket.

My Human drives fast to the Fur Doctor. By the time we get there, my ear has stopped bleeding and the stingy feeling is gone.

We go inside and into one of the window door rooms. The Fur Doctor enters our room and lifts my ear. I push him away and dance out of his reach. I don't want him to touch my ear.

The Fur Doctor leaves and another Human comes in. I smell insecurity. He lifts me onto the table. He tries to put sticky things on my ears. I shake very hard and the sticky stuff flies onto the floor. This is a great game and I wiggle and wiggle.

My Human grabs me around the middle, and he tries to put the sticky stuff back on my ears. I swing my head hard. Another point for me in the sticky game.

My Human giggles. "I don't think that's going to work."

The other Human talks to her in a tone that sounds mean. I smell her irritation. My Human knows me. I don't like my ears stuck in my fur with sticky things.

The Human disappears and comes back with one of the plastic cones. My Human takes it and won't let him put it on me.

I shake my head again. My ear feels like there is a big clump of blood stuck at the end and I can't get it off.

The man hands my Human something in a bottle and we leave. She takes me to the car and I get inside. She gives me a treat from the treat bag. I have been good at the Fur Doctor. I won the sticky ear game.

We drive home and she gives me peanut butter with the crunchy medicine. I lick it all up.

Merlynn's throw-up is in the hallway and I sniff at it. It's all the wet food my Human gave her before we left. My Human wipes it up and leaves a damp spot on the carpet. I look for a treat inside the sandbox, but my ear gets a little caught on the cover, and I yelp.

My Human rushes up to me. "Stormy? Are you okay?" She squats beside me. I press against her. I am tired. The medicine treat makes me tired. She leads me back to the couch and we both lie down.

Merlynn gets into my soft bed beside the couch. She is smaller with all the throw-ups and curls up tight. "I'm cold," she meows.

## MERLYNN



The smelly elk surround our house. The deep and dank smell permeates the walls. I wake in my plush bed. I whine and paw at the side of my Human's bed. I don't sleep in my Human's bed anymore. The high jump down from the bed makes my leg ache. My Human moved my plush bed next to hers. She leaves me treats at night, and I stretch out. I miss sleeping with her, but I like my space too.

"What time is it, Stormy?" My Human rolls over and looks at her square box. "It's too early to get up. It's still dark."

I whine. I need to go out, and the smelly elk are all around our house.

She gets up and opens the window door. I run into the bushes and sit down. I smell the elk on the hillside behind our house. But there is another smell. Coyote. I'm scared to come inside because the coyote might see me, leap down the hillside, and eat me.

"Stormy?" My Human calls in her whisper night voice from the porch.

I stay in my spot in the bushes.

My Human walks outside and fumbles in the bushes until her hands reach me. My Human grabs my collar and I stagger inside with her.

When we get inside, she sits on the couch and I jump up beside her. I press very close and shiver.

"What's wrong, Stormy?" She pets my fur.

We lie down on the couch and I lean against her. When the light comes up, I don't go outside again. I only eat some of my breakfast. This makes my Human smell very worried.

Merlynn wants to go out. She meows at the door.

I warn her. "The elk are here and something else is with them. Something dangerous."

Merlynn ignores me and slips behind the bushes to leave her poop.

I stay close to my Human all day. I don't want to take a long walk and pull hard on the leash to tell my Human I want to go home. At night, she pats my soft bed and gives me a special treat.

But in the early morning, I smell them again. The elk are outside. I whine and paw her bed. She gets up and lets me outside. The coyote is back. I hear him cry. I crouch low in the bushes and won't move. My Human picks me up and carries me inside. The moon is full and shines on the backyard like a spotlight.

There is a crashing by the trash cans, and she jumps with me in her arms.

I smell raccoons.

All the woods animals are visiting us tonight.

The next day, lots of cars go by our house. There are lots of Humans visiting the sand. Merlynn goes in and out all day. The sun sinks low in the sky, and Merlynn smells bad. She is very thin, and when she breathes, I can see her fur press against her ribs.

She jumps on the table. Merlynn stares at my Human and then at me. She hops off the table and walks outside. When we go to bed, she has not come back inside.

When we wake up, my Human opens the back door. If Merlynn stays out all night, she waits on the outdoor couch cushions for the morning. The porch is covered and she stays dry from the rain.

This morning, she is not there.

My Human smells like worry.

After I eat and my Human eats her breakfast, she leaves in the car and is gone all day. I sit at the porch door and wait for Merlynn to come back. But she does not return.

When my Human gets home and sees Merlynn is not at the porch door, the worry smell is stronger. My Human clips my leash to my collar. We go for a walk, and my Human talks to two small Humans on bikes who have cat stuffed animals attached to their bikes. Neither one is very interested in me, even though I wiggle and wiggle at them. They tell my Human they saw Merlynn last night and talked to her. They ride off on their bikes and call Merlynn's name.

We walk very slowly around the neighborhood and talk to lots of people. My Human stops at all the places where there are bushes and tall grasses and calls for Merlynn.

Another sleep goes by and Merlynn does not come back.



On the third sleep night, we have a big wind. The house shakes and the windows rattle. My Human is sleepless and gets up a lot. I sleep and snore most of the night. Big winds don't bother me.

Merlynn has not come home in the morning, and now there are trees and branches on the streets. Smoke fills the air and gets in my lungs and makes me slow on our walk.

My Human packs a bag of her clothes. She packs my food bag. But she doesn't pack Merlynn's food bag. Merlynn has been gone for four sleeps.

We leave and go for a long car ride to the place where Neuma lives and with whom I once shared my itchy bugs. Mom Human lives here with Neuma, and we stay for a long time. I slip under the fence and find the woods next door. My Human calls for me, but the woods next door are very interesting and I don't go to her right away. This makes my Human very angry with me; afterward, I have to be on my leash every time I go out to the yard.

Every morning, I wake Neuma up. She sleeps in her room on her scratching post. I have to walk through her room to get to my food bowl. I bark at her and she hisses. When I am eating, she dashes upstairs and Mom Human yells at my Human. During the day, I try to play with Neuma. She sits on a chair and bats her paw claws at me. Sometimes one claw gets stuck in my fur and I yelp. This makes my Human yell at Mom Human.

After many sleeps, we go back to our home.

When we get home, I run inside and check Merlynn's litter. But she hasn't been inside, so there are no tasty treats. I sniff for her in the yard. I sniff for her under the porch. I

sniff for her on the cushions on the porch, but I don't smell her.

Every morning, I get up and go to the window door and look for Merlynn. My Human closes her poop box and empties the litter. She doesn't replace it with more litter. She picks up her food bowls and doesn't put any more inside.

I smell sadness. A lot of sadness.

One day, I see Merlynn. Her spirit form lies on the table and stretches out. She doesn't smell bad. She doesn't smell at all. She is young and fat like she used to be. I nudge against the table, and her spirit paw brushes my back. Merlynn purrs. "It was fun living with you. Watch over our Human."

"Stormy?" My Human says. She can't see Merlynn.

I wiggle to her and press up against her. "I am here," I say. "I will take care of you."

## A NEW FRIEND



**F**or a while, I am my Human's only pet. Sometimes she rolls out a mat and stretches. I show her how to do a real downward dog. I lie down beside her and listen to the soothing voice coming from the box. Sometimes she lies down on the mat for a long time and the soothing voice puts both of us into a very restful state.

It is a lot of long winter days, and my legs hurt a lot. We don't go on many sand walks. At night I groan and can't find a comfortable place to lie. The hardwood makes my legs hurt, and the couch is too soft, and I have a hard time getting on and off. My Human brings my plush bed to sit beside the couch. I lie in it and watch the birds as they return to the backyard. I miss Merlynn.

One day when the grass is getting tall again and the birds have all come back, my Human brings out Merlynn's carry cage from the closet. She pours litter into the box. I wiggle and wiggle. Someone is coming. A cat someone. I will have tasty litter treats to eat again and small morsels of food will

fall off the counter. I dance around. The weather warms and my legs feel better.

My Human leaves with the cat cage, and I sleep on the couch. It's still my favorite spot to sleep when she's gone.

Finally, I hear the car and hop off the couch. I am so excited. A new cat friend will be in the crate for me to meet! But when my Human comes inside, I sniff at the cage. It's empty. And I smell sad.

My Human goes to the back bedroom and stuffs the cat-carry cage into the closet. I guess whoever was supposed to be in the cage didn't want to meet me.

That afternoon I join my dog friends for a walk on the beach. I walk with my dog friend, Hugo. We like to walk behind the Humans for treats. My other two dog friends are very young and race and chase. Sometimes they get too close to the Humans, and my Human clips the leash to me and we take a few steps away. I talk to Hugo about the new cat friend. But he doesn't live with a cat and doesn't understand why I would want to have a new cat friend.

"Just be glad it's not a new dog friend," Hugo says. "The Humans get those when they know you are going to be leaving them soon."

I shiver. My Human would never get a new dog while I am her dog!

A few weeks later, my Human takes the cat cage out again. She leaves and doesn't return for a long time. When she does, the cat cage moves around and smells like a cat! I am so excited. I follow my Human to the back bedroom where she sets the cage down and opens it up. The cat is

small, much smaller than Merlynn, and in a flash, she is gone and under the bed. I sniff at her cage.

My Human pulls me out of the room and shuts the door. I whine at the door. I really want to meet the new cat. I don't think she is an old cat like Merlynn. I think she is a young cat just like Cleo! But my Human motions me to follow her. "Treat?"

During the day, I smell the cat in the house, but she is very quiet. My Human goes in and out of the cat's room. One time I follow her and sit at the closed bedroom door and whine.

At night, the cat meows and thumps around in the room. But in the daytime, she is very quiet.

The third night, my Human leaves the cat's room door open. She makes me stay in my plush bed by giving me treats. The cat walks down the hall and into our room. I hold very still while she darts in and out of the room. I growl when she gets too close to my bed. I don't want her this close. This is my bed. I do not want to share my bed with her.

My Human turns off the lights and I close my eyes. I can smell the cat, but I am tired and go to sleep.

In the morning, the cat is sitting on my Human's bed in the same spot where Cleo used to sleep. She is curled up against my Human's feet. I miss sleeping with my Human, but at night, she leans down and pets me. I can spread out on my plush bed, and my legs feel better when I sleep in my bed. I am glad the new cat is sleeping on my Human's bed. My Human needs an animal to sleep with her.

The cat darts down the hall and behind the door of the other bedroom. My Human fills her food tray on the bath-

room counter. I wait for a few morsels to drop, and my Human sees me waiting and slips me a few tasty cat food treats. I smell the litter box. The lid isn't on and I stick my nose into the box. There isn't a lot in there, and my Human nudges me aside with her leg before I eat anything.

The cat stays inside the bedroom during the day and is very quiet.

At night, my Human opens the bedroom door and the cat wanders around. She finds the bathroom and spends a lot of time knocking things over and pushing things around on the floor. Eventually, she comes back to her spot on my Human's bed at the end of her feet.

In the morning, when I wake up, the cat is already awake and staring at me.

"Hello," she meows at me in a very high-pitched kitty voice.

"Grr..." I growl back. I am grumpy in the mornings.

"Scary! Scary!" The cat runs off and down the hall, away from me. She has a very young, high-pitched meow. It doesn't sound like Merlynn at all. I stand up and shake-off. I whine and wake my Human up. While she gets up, I take one of my Human's slippers and trot down the hall. The other bedroom door is open.

"Stormy!" My Human calls to me.

I sniff for the cat and place my nose under the bed. She stares back at me and blinks her eyes.

"Stormy!" My Human grabs me by the scruff of the neck and pulls me away from the cat.

"I just want to smell her," I whine.

In the afternoon, the cat appears. She skates across the

hardwood floor and hides behind the table. I stare at her and bark. Once. Twice.

The cat darts out and races across the floor.

I growl and dart after her.

Chase!

"Stormy!" My Human says.

Why am I in trouble? The cat did it.

That night, when I am in bed and the cat walks past me, I growl.

"Scary, scary," she meows and dashes out of the room.

My Human sighs and turns over in bed.

## THE PINK SUIT



The new cat has a lot of energy. My Human gives her a mouse toy. The cat tosses it in the air. She leaps over the tables, couch, and chairs. At night, the cat tries to get into my Human's covers. She presses close against my Human's face and paws her hair. In the middle of the night, my Human says, "No! Thumbelina! Stop!"

Things crash to the ground as Thumbelina leaps onto the tables and knocks off my Human's special things. In the morning, I sniff them. I know they shouldn't be on the floor.

But Thumbelina doesn't stop.

"I can't, I can't stop!" She leaps through the air. "I have so much energy!"

I want to sniff Thumbelina. I want to ask her about her name, but she doesn't stop moving.

And then one day, my Human places her in the carry crate. My Human returns with an empty crate. Thumbelina's litter box is still here and so is her food bowl, so I know she will be back. In the afternoon, my Human moves the



food and litter box to the second bedroom. She closes the second bedroom door and tells me, "No, Stormy. You may not go in there."

I whine.

My Human leaves with the cat's carry cage, and when she returns, Thumbelina is inside. My Human carries the crate into the bedroom with the litter and food. Thumbelina tumbles out and she is wearing a small suit that covers her body. Her back legs don't work and she drags herself under the bed. I smell medicine. The same kind of medicine I had when I had my surgery.

My Human motions me out of the bedroom.

I feel sad for Thumbelina and sit by the door. I whine to let her know I am here for her.

My Human checks on Thumbelina, but I am not allowed in the room. I whine outside the door to let them know I want to be with them.

My Human leaves the door open and Thumbelina is in her bed, under the chair. She blinks her eyes. "Spay," she meows.

I know spay. It's when they take out the parts that make you have little animals like you. I had a neuter a long time ago.

For two sleeps, Thumbelina stays in the bedroom. At night, she crashes against the door. In the morning, my Human checks on her. "Oh no! You have to wear the pink suit!"

On the third sleep, Thumbelina is up all night, crashing against the door and meowing. My Human gets up and opens the bedroom door. Thumbelina's suit makes her

walk funny. She slides across the floor on her stomach and rolls.

My Human gets into her bed, and I curl into mine. In the middle of the night, Thumbelina wakes me up.

"Can I sleep with you?" She slides to my bed.

"No," I growl.

Thumbelina slides and rolls to the hiding place under the blankets by the chair.

After a few sleeps, Thumbelina's energy returns and she runs and tumbles in her pink suit.

One day my Human sets out blankets and pillows on the couch in a slumber party for her. She leaves with her mask on. I jump on the couch and make myself a bed in the blankets.

Thumbelina tries to jump on the couch, but the suit makes her legs not work in jumps. She meows.

"Did the Human name you?" I lean over the couch and stare at her.

"My other Human named me," Thumbelina says. "I was rescued as a young kitten. I lived with a Human, three dogs, and two cats who had a litter of kittens. Humans came to take away my kitten friends. One by one." Thumbelina's squeaky voice is sad. "I wanted to stay with my dog friends. I didn't want to leave with our Human."

"Our Human names all her pets," I said. "Cleo. Merlynn. Stormy. You can't have a name from your other Human."

"I am Thumbelina," she squeaks. "I miss my dog friends. I slept with them. Can I sleep with you?"

I growl. "No."

When my Human returns, she sinks into the couch. She

looks at me funny. "The vaccine isn't making me sick," she says. "I feel fine."

I get vaccines too. We see the Fur Doctor and he gives me shots. They make me tired but never sick.

I jump off the couch and wiggle. "Walk?"

My Human throws off the covers and sets aside the pillow. "Why not?" She clips my leash to my collar and we walk to the park.

After many sleeps, my Human takes off Thumbelina's pink suit. Thumbelina jumps on the table and then the mantle. She rubs herself along the dried flowers and bits drop to the floor. My Human scoops her to the floor. Thumbelina rubs against my Human's legs and plays with her mouse, tossing it high in the air and catching it.

But at night, Thumbelina sleeps. She jumps on the bed and sleeps with my Human. The spay took away her night energy.

## PLAY



I feel something brush against my nose and I smell Thumbelina. She is in my bed! I growl. She rubs against my head. I growl again.

My Human reaches down from her bed and she pets me. Thumbelina leaps off the bed and jumps onto the Human's bed. She leans over and stares at me. "Get up," she meows.

My stomach feels empty, so it must be time to get up. I roll out of my bed and step onto the floor. I bring my Human her slippers and do my happy dance for her. This morning my legs are feeling good, so I stand on my back legs and place my paws on her bed. "Get up," I bark at her.

Thumbelina swishes her tail into my face. It tickles, and I move my head away from her. Thumbelina is almost as tall as I am, but my body is thicker in the middle. It must be all the treats. Sometimes I go in and out the door a lot. I don't tell my Human that I don't need to go outside to do my business, but I think she knows. I get treats every time I come inside.

I dance to the window door and wait until my Human opens it. I don't rush out as fast as I once did, and some mornings it's a slow go down the two stairs that lead to the grass. My legs feel good this morning and I walk around and sniff before I find just the right spot. The birds chirp at me and are very loud. I bark at them, just to let them know this is my backyard.

My Human calls me in. Thumbelina stands at the screen door. "Out," she meows at my Human.

Thumbelina can't go outside. Bad things happen to cats who go outside. It is my job to bark and pounce at her.

"You can't go out," I bark.

Thumbelina runs away and down the hall.

I do my happy dance and my Human gets my breakfast. There are lots of goodies in my meals. I get soft and squishy treats—a different one for breakfast and dinner. At dinner, I get a tasty liquid treat. It's poured over my crunchy food morsels. I love dinner and scarf it all up in seconds. Getting older means the Humans love you even more and want to make sure you know it!

My Human sits down to work at her table on the box that talks back to her. I head down the hall to sniff for treats in Thumbelina's sandbox. Thumbelina uses Merlynn's sandbox with the big top and keeps it in the closet with the door open. It took me a while, but I learned how to slip my head inside and snag a tasty morsel with my teeth. I carefully bring my head out of the box and lay the treat on the carpet. But this morning something is wrong. I grab my treat and then can't get my head out of the box. I shake my head hard and the sandbox top attaches itself to me. I step out of the

closet and the sandbox top is still attached to me. I shake my head and it bangs against the wall. It's dark and scary in here, and I want the top off me. I howl.

My Human runs down the hall, "Stormy!"

Her hands grab my body and she lifts the top off my head.

I am free from the awful box top.

Thumbelina sits at the bedroom door and stares at me. My Human leaves the room to go back to her talking box.

"What's a Stormy?" Thumbelina asks.

"My name," I say and shake my head. Sometimes things get caught in my ears and I have to do a lot of shakes for them to go away. "Did you come from the shelter?"

"What's the shelter?" Thumbelina purrs and rubs against me.

"A place where animals go when Humans don't want us," I say. "I came from a good home. I was destined for greatness as an agility dog. But I became a pet dog and I am magnificent!"

"I came from a good home too," Thumbelina purrs. "There were two cats and they had kittens. I liked the kittens a lot. They were my playmates. But then---" she stops purring. "Humans came and took them away."

"That's what happened to my littermates too," I say. "But sometimes I see them. We go to places where they compete in agility."

"I want to go out," Thumbelina meows and prances down the hall.

I follow her. "You can't. The woods animals steal cats."

"But you go out," Thumbelina meows.

"I stay in my fence," I say. "And my Human walks me on a leash. She could walk you on a leash."

Thumbelina wrinkles her nose. "I am a cat. I go where I want. I don't walk on leashes." Thumbelina rubs against me. "Why don't you go out again and I can sneak out?"

"No," I bark.

"Stormy?" My Human says. "Do you need to go out?"

"Bark, bark!" I dance in circles to the door.

Thumbelina follows me, but the Human places her foot in front of the door and only lets me go out.

After I chase a bird and do my business, Thumbelina claws the screen door.

I chase her into the room. "You can't go out," I bark at her. "It's dangerous!" I don't want Thumbelina to get stolen by the woods animals like Merlynn.

My Human gives me three small treats and praises me.

I am tired and ready for my morning nap. I jump up on the couch. The cushions are low enough that it doesn't hurt my legs to jump. I do a couple turnarounds and make myself a nest out of the blankets my Human leaves on the couch for me.

I shut my eyes and smell Thumbelina near me. She sniffs my legs and moves closer to my face. I don't growl and wait to see what she will do. Merlynn never got this close to me.

Thumbelina turns over on her back. She gives me a cat flirt glance and then bats my left ear with her paw.

"Ouch!" I yelp.

She bats my ear again and tries to grab onto it with her teeth.

I yelp louder and my Human rushes over. She pushes

Thumbelina off the couch and sits down beside me. "It's okay," she coos in that soft voice.

"Thumbelina!" she scolds. "Leave Stormy's ears alone!"

I press against my Human. "Protect me from Thumbelina."



## I AM DRIVEN



I don't take multiple walks a day on the sand. I spend a lot of time in my backyard. My Human piles up wood so I can't leap off the back ledge in my made-up agility course. I bark at the ball thieves next door, but something zaps and they don't bark back to me. When I get too restless in the house and chase Thumbelina, the Human gets mad at both of us. She clips my leash to my collar, and I take neighborhood walks. I sniff yards and bushes and leave my pee. My favorite walk is to the park. Bunnies live at the park. They are fat and happy bunnies. A Human once left some pet bunnies behind, and the bunnies multiplied. The visiting Humans bring food for the bunnies. I like to find the food crumbs the bunnies haven't eaten. Humans also eat a lot of Human food at the park. Crumbs are always under tables for me to eat. Sometimes we get in the car and ride to the woods. But the elk smell is always in the woods, and I am a little scared. I miss my dog pals on the sand walks. Sometimes I

greet my dog pals as they walk down the big hill. They smell like treats, ocean water, and sand.

And then, one morning, my Human says we are going for a walk on the sand. I dance in circles. We haven't had a morning sand walk in a long time! She clips my leash to my collar and we go outside. I pull in the direction of the big gravel hill, but she pulls me toward the car. I don't want to get in the car. Morning car rides take me to the Fur Doctor.

My Human and I play tug-of-war with the leash, but my Human wins.

"Jump up." She pats the seat.

I stare hard at the back seat and take a few steps backward and forward to get ready to jump. When I push off my back legs, her hand comes behind me and gives me the strength to land in the back seat on my towel. I don't sit down, and I press my face to my window. I whine.

My Human drives me up the hill to the sand. She parks the car and opens the back door. I jump down and all my dog friends wait for me! I wiggle and bark at them. Drizzle dashes down the sand dunes. I am a little slower and Hugo is behind me. But we all make it to the sand. Drizzle races and chases with two other dogs who I don't know. I explore all the small pools just for me. The Humans give me lots of treats. "We missed you, Stormy."

I wiggle for them. "I missed you too."

After the sand walk, we walk up the dunes. My legs are warmed up and I jump in the back seat of the car. My Human drives me down the gravel hill. She doesn't even tether my leash to the back seat. We are home fast.

We don't walk every morning. But we walk a lot more on

the sand. We always repeat the up-the-hill car ride every time we take a morning walk.

"Why do you get to ride in the car?" Drizzle sniffs me. "I run up the hill."

"My legs hurt when I walk up the hill." I sniff her butt. She smells like the special raw bones.

Hugo hops out of his car. He dances around me in his lopsided dance. Hugo has a plush bed in the back of his car, just like my bed that I sleep in. I wonder if one day I will get a bed like that for my car rides too. I don't ever want to stop my sand walks.

# MY BED IS CROWDED



I dream that I am chasing the bunnies. My Human never lets me get the bunnies, but in my dreams, I capture all of them. I woof and squeal and whine in my dream.

My legs kick out and something is pressed against the back of me.

I sniff.

Thumbelina.

She presses closer and I shift, trying to move away from her.

My Human sleeps in her bed beside mine. "Stormy?"

She leans over the bed. "Oh! Thumbelina!"

I scrunch myself up in the top part of my bed. It's uncomfortable lying with my body all scrunched up.

I roll out of my bed and walk to the hallway. With a loud sigh, I plop down against the wall and go back to sleep.

But I don't sleep long.

"Stormy?" My Human's hand rubs my fur. "Are you okay?"

I stretch out but don't open my eyes.

"Come on," my Human says. "You need to come back to your bed."

I get up and follow my Human into the bedroom. Thumbelina is gone and I stretch out across my thick, plush bed.

"This is your special bed," my Human says. "You have to sleep here so your legs will feel like running in the morning."

I know exactly what my Human is saying to me. This is my special bed. She brings it everywhere with us. Sometimes when we stay at Mom Human's house, where the bed is low, I can jump up and sleep with her. But at our house, I always sleep in my special bed.

My Human opens the window and pulls up the shade. "Thumbelina can sit here," she says and gets back into her bed.

Her hand reaches down to pet me. She pets me for a long time.

I feel bad she woke up. I smell her worry smell. She always has a worried smell when she wakes up at night.

Thumbelina jumps up to the window and crashes against the blinds.

I smell my Human's irritation.

She keeps petting me, and I stretch myself across my bed. I make sure to take up all the space so Thumbelina doesn't have any room.

Thumbelina tries to get in my bed for three sleeps. I growl at her. My Human picks up Thumbelina and places

her outside the bedroom door. She shuts the door and gets back into bed. "Now she won't bother us, Stormy. Go back to sleep."

But Thumbelina scratches and howls at the door for the rest of the night.

The next night, my Human places Thumbelina in the room at the end of the hall. She is quiet that night and we all sleep.

But the next night, my Human forgets to lock Thumbelina into her bedroom and she is back in my bed.

"Want to play?" she meows. "Nighttime is fun playtime."

I growl at her.

My Human wakes up.

The next morning, my Human feeds me and gets back into her bed. "I'm tired, Stormy," she says and pulls the covers up.

I wait for her to get up. I'm not patient and I place my paws on her bed and whine. Very loudly. My Human gets up and sits on the couch with her smelly coffee and book. She is grumpy.

When it is bedtime, my Human brings Thumbelina's small bed from the bedroom down the hall. I don't think Thumbelina has slept in it since she wore her pink suit and had stitches.

My Human places Thumbelina's bed next to my bed.

I sniff. It smells like Thumbelina.

Thumbelina sniffs at it and climbs in. She turns around, wraps her tail around her, and stares at me.

I get into my bed next to her and stare at my Human.

My Human claps her hand and I smell joy. "Everyone has a bed!" She gives me a treat.

"You don't get a treat," I say to Thumbelina. "You stay in your bed without treats. I get treats so I will stay."

"But you always stay in your bed," Thumbelina meows.

"Because I get treats." I lick my paw. I've started licking my paws when I'm nervous. Thumbelina makes me nervous.

My Human puts on her night sleeping clothes and gets into her bed. She leans down and pets me. She leans down and pets Thumbelina. "Good night," she says in her happy voice.

For two sleeps, Thumbelina stays in her bed. She gets up to eat her food or to use her sandbox but returns to her bed. In the day, when she takes her big nap, she gets back into her bed.

"Why are you in your bed all day?" I sniff at her.

"I like my bed," Thumbelina says. "Daytime is for sleeping."

But Thumbelina doesn't stay in her bed. She tries to get into mine again.

"Grrr," I growl.

"I want to get in your bed." Thumbelina sniffs me and steps into my bed. She brushes against my fur. "I like to sleep with dogs."

"Grr."

"Stormy?" The Human's voice is sleepy and irritated.

"Go away," I growl at Thumbelina.

"Get up," Thumbelina leans against me in my bed. "It's time to get up."

I get up and flop on the floor by the bedroom window. My stomach doesn't feel empty yet. It's not time to get up.

"Oh no," my Human throws back her covers. I smell her sleep.

"Stormy." She gestures to my bed. "Get back into bed. It's too early."

I get back into my bed.

"See," I tell Thumbelina. "It is not time to get up yet."

"Yes, it is." Thumbelina presses against my nose.

I growl.

My Human grumbles.

Thumbelina hops into my bed. "Get up." She bats my ears.

I get up and lie against the wall of the bedroom. I whine at my Human. "Get up."

My Human throws off her covers. She smells like sleep and irritation. She walks into the kitchen and pours my breakfast into a bowl. I am too tired to do my breakfast happy dance, but I eat all my tasty morsels. Afterward, I go outside to sniff and do my business. The sun hasn't come up yet and it is still dark.

When I come back in, my Human smells like coffee. She shuts the door and sits on the couch with her books. I curl up next to her.

In the bedroom, Thumbelina curls into her bed. "Good night." She closes her eyes and wraps her tail around her.



## MY CALENDAR



**M**y Human unpacks the unreal tree. The tree is as old as I am, and I have stopped trying to pee on it. Thumbelina sits underneath the unreal tree and chews on the branches. My Human spends a long time unwrapping the hanging items and placing them on the branches. When my Human finishes and lays out the tree's cloth, Thumbelina rolls around underneath and bats at the hanging things.

My Human disappears into the kitchen and returns with a smelly lemon. She places it under the unreal tree. Thumbelina picks it up with her claw paws and hurls it to the other side of the tree. It's the first time I've seen Thumbelina use her claw paws. She never uses them on the Human or I like Merlynn.

"What is it?" Thumbelina says in her high-pitched, squeaky voice.

"An unreal tree." I jump on the couch and rest my head on the armrest. I like to stare at the twinkly lights.

"Why is it in our living room?" Thumbelina hops up beside me on the couch.

I growl at her to let her know I don't want her too close.

"It's a Human party," I say. "There will be special things for us under the tree soon."

"Special things?" Thumbelina squeaks.

"Toys," I say. "And special treats."

Thumbelina creeps closer to me. "I like special toys."

Thumbelina has a lot of toys. She has a long stick with feathers on the end, a couple of small mice that I like to eat, and a stuffed banana she bats around in her paws that smells like catnip.

"Stormy." My Human rubs my ears. My ears are sore and I lean against her hand. Every day she squirts the soft medicine and rubs a cloth inside my ears to make them feel better.

My Human sits down beside me and lifts Thumbelina out of the way. Thumbelina squirms out of the Human's hands and slips behind the unreal tree. She bats at the shiny ribbon, but my Human doesn't see her.

"Look." My Human shows me the small box in her hand. She carries the box around everywhere and spends a lot of time looking at it.

Two dogs that look like me are inside the small box. I sniff at the screen, but I don't smell them.

She clicks a button and the dog barks.

I bark at the dog in the box.

My Human laughs.

The small dogs sniff at a box, and a Human opens a small door and pulls out treats. She gives them to the dogs.

"Bark. Bark. Bark." I want treats.

"Do you want an Advent calendar?" my Human asks.

I don't know what an Advent calendar is, but I want the thing with the small doors that open and treats are inside. I bark at my Human.

My Human stands and walks to one of the large plastic tubs that sit in the living room. The tubs always come out with the unreal tree. She reaches inside one and pulls out a large box.

My Human walks to where my treats are and places the box on the counter.

I bark. Treat. Treat.

"No, Stormy," my Human says. "I am making your Advent calendar."

It sounds like she says making your dinner so I sit. I give her my best I-love-you look and blink my eyes at her. My eyes are a little crusty. I have a lot of goobers in my eyes. My Human tries to get them out every day, but I don't like her washcloth and twist away from her.

My Human opens a lot of little doors and fills each one with my treats. Thumbelina sits on the kitchen counter and watches my Human. There aren't any treats for Thumbelina in the box. When she is finished, she places the box on the shelf above where my leash hangs.

"Would you like to open an Advent door?" she asks. "Each day we will count down the days until Christmas."

I bark at her. I've been waiting forever for a treat! I don't need to count down the days to Christmas. Every day is Christmas for me.

She opens a small door and pulls out one of the treats. "Here you go."

I do my best to sit, but it's a little sloppy because I have been waiting a long time for this treat.

I scarf it down.

"Good job, Stormy," my Human says. "Tomorrow you can have another treat from the Advent calendar."

"I want a treat," Thumbelina meows.

My Human doesn't understand Thumbelina. Cats and Humans don't go to a training school to learn how to communicate.

My Human pets Thumbelina. "You are a good cat," she says.

Thumbelina stares at my Human and swishes her tail. She is not pleased that I have a treat box and she does not.

I don't know why my Human and I are playing this silly Advent calendar game. I will have another treat after I go for my walk, another one after dinner, and three or four more on the way to getting in my bed. And then when I am in my bed, my Human will give me the best treat, two morsels from Thumbelina's food dish.

But I play along with my Human's game and wiggle at her. "Treat?" I eye the box on the shelf.

"No," My Human says and laughs. "Tomorrow."

## DEFLOOFED



**M**y fur is very heavy. I plod steps down the porch steps. I can't see out of my furry eyes.  
"Come here, Stormy," my Human says.

I plod back to her.

She holds my jaw together so I can't turn my head away and snips the hair around my eyes. But she doesn't hold me as tight as the Fur Cut Human. I wiggle away from her. Bits of fur drop alongside my nose, and I rub my snout along the couch.

When I am finished, I flop on the floor

Thumbelina walks close to me, and I growl.

She tries to play with my furry paw. Her paw claw gets stuck in my fur.

I growl at her. "Get your paw claws out of my fur."

"You are very furry," Thumbelina squeaks. "I like your fur."

When I lie on the couch, Thumbelina tries to lie next to me.

"Grrr..." I say.

"I like your fur. You are warm!"

At night, I lick my paws for a long time. The night is very long and I am hot. I get up and lie against the wall.

"Stormy?" My Human says in her sleepy voice. "Get back in your bed."

I plod over to my bed and plop into it. I groan. My fur is so heavy.

Every time we take a car ride and go in the direction of the Fur Cut Human's shop, I stand up in the back seat and press my nose against the window. But the Human doesn't stop.

My fur keeps growing.

Finally, my Human places me in the car and we arrive at the Fur Cut Human's shop.

"Bye, Stormy," my Human says.

"No!" I skid on the floor and pull very hard against the Fur Cut Human. "Please. I don't want to stay here." I want my fur cut, but I don't want a bath.

My Human smells sad and anxious, and I keep pulling. My eyes are straining to make her take me home.

It doesn't work, and I am placed in the room with the other dogs, waiting to get our fur cut.

The Fur Cut Human never cuts my fur first. She cuts the little, small dogs. They all get cuts, blown out, and brushed. When they are finished, she ties a cloth around their neck. The Humans pick them up at lunchtime.

In the afternoon it is my turn. The Fur Cut Human bathes me. Her hands are a little rough, but the massage feels good and I press against her.

She places me on the table and uses the machine that makes a lot of humming noises. My fur falls to the floor in large clumps.

When she gets to my eyes, she says, "Your Human gave you a fur cut?"

I blink my eyes at her. She shakes her head and uses her fancy scissors. She is fast and it's over in seconds.

All the eye boogers fall away with my fur.

When she is done, I feel so much lighter. I have lost twenty pounds of fur. I nestle against the Fur Cut Human's hand and lick her face. "Thank you for my Fur Cut."

The shop door opens and I smell my Human. The Fur Cut Human places me on the floor. She clips on my collar and leash, and I pull and pull to the door.

"Stormy!"

I run to my Human. I smell her gladness to see me, and I smell her displeasure. She doesn't like my new Fur Cut.

She talks to the Fur Cut Human and then leads me out the door. I pee a long time. I have to hold it all inside when I am at the Fur Cutter.

I jump into the back seat. I can see very well now and it's not hard to jump into the car.

My Human turns around to look at me after she gets in the front of the car. "She didn't give you a bandanna," my Human says. Sadness is in her voice. "I don't think you look very good. Your fur is too short."

We drive home and I get a special bone marrow treat. I chew and chew.

When I am finished, I race up the stairs and chase Thumbelina.

"Augh." Thumbelina meows and ducks for cover under the bed. "Why are you so fast?"

"My fur is gone!" I wiggle and lie on my belly to see Thumbelina under the bed. "I can see you! I have been defloofed!"

Thumbelina creeps out from under the bed. I pounce at her. She scurries back under the bed.

"Scary," she squeaks. "I want your fur back!"

I race down the stairs, taking three at a time, and leap off the last step.

My Human clips my leash to me and we go for a walk. I see everything. I feel so light. I race ahead of my Human and she has to run to keep up.

When we get back, my Human says, "Nap, Stormy."

Instead of me getting into my bed, I eye hers.

"Okay," she says. "Can you jump up here?"

Even though I feel lighter, my legs are still ten years old. I jump, and my Human helps me get onto the bed.

I turn around on her bed and get my smell all over the covers.

Thumbelina stares at me. "Why are you in my bed?"

"You can have my bed," I bark at her.

Thumbelina stares at me. "That is my bed," she meows.

But I know different. My Human's bed was my bed first.

I lie down and stare out the window.

"That's my spot." Thumbelina hops on the bed, but she doesn't get near me. She stays near my Human and lies against her side, far away from me.

"It was my spot first," I growl.



We all close our eyes and take naps.  
Defloofing wears me out.

## THE SOUNDS ARE GONE



**I**n the fall, the dark takes over the days, and the leaves crunch under my feet. My ear drips with wax, and I scratch to get the wax to go away. I also shake my head a lot to clear the buzzing out of my ears.

My Human places a smelly liquid on a piece of cotton. She rubs the insides of my ears. I stand very still. I don't mind getting my ears wiped out. It's not the same as when my Human comes at me with a warm cloth and tries to get the goobers out of my eyes. She never gets very many of the goobers. I rub my face alongside the chair and couch to move the goobers away from the outer edges of my eye.

I don't bark at the UPS truck because I can't hear it, and the UPS Human stops leaving me treats with the packages. My Human always gets a treat for me out of my jar, but I know she gave it to me and not the UPS Human. One day when we are on a walk, the UPS truck drives by us and stops.

"You still have your dog," the UPS Human says.

I eye the box of treats he keeps on his dashboard. He

rides all around town with the red and black treat box plastered against his window.

I bark at the UPS Human. "I am still here!"

He reaches into the box and hands my Human two treats. She opens her palm and I scarf them up.

When my Human leaves the house, I don't hear her return. I sleep in the big chair and Thumbelina sleeps on the soft cushions behind me. Sometimes I let her share my chair. It's not so lonely with Thumbelina beside me.

"Stormy," my Human places her hand on my back, and I jolt awake.

"Hi, Human." I hop off the chair and wiggle for her, just like I always do when she comes home. I am so glad to see her.

She runs her hand over my back. "You don't hear me, do you?" She smells sad.

I don't want my Human to be sad. When I know she should be home soon, I lie by the door. When the door opens, I jump up and wiggle for her. But sometimes I don't hear her car on the gravel, and I am sleeping when she opens the door.

The deep silence frightens me. When I don't see my Human go into a different room, I whine very loudly for her.

She hurries out of whatever room, and I wiggle. "Human! You are here!"

I don't go on as many car rides anymore. My leg aches with all the jumping in and out of the car and I can't settle into my plush bed at night.

But some days are what my Human calls "good old dog days."

I leap out of my bed, chase Thumbelina down the hall, and race back to my Human's bed. I pick up my Human's slipper feet and dance around her bed.

"Get up!" I bark at her.

She throws off her covers and the smell of her sleep fills the room.

I race out of the sleep room and into the living room. I dance around with her slipper and wait by the glass door. The birds peck at small bits of weeds on the patio.

Bark. Bark. "Let me out, Human."

Thumbelina winds her way around me. Her tail flashes in my nose. She wants out too, but I growl at her.

"Scary, scary," she meows and scurries under the chair.

My Human opens the slider and I bolt outside. The birds fly away, and I run my made-up agility course to the woodpile.

"I smell you." I wiggle at the chipmunks who have nested into the back of the woodpile. It's a game we've been playing since they made a home in our woodpile. I used to smell the chipmunk nest on the other side of the fence with the ball thieves. But the ball thieves chased them to the woodpile. Merlynn isn't here to catch them, and I don't want them to leave their nest. I just want to sniff them.

The chipmunks press against the wood and their dark eyes stare at me.

"Don't be afraid," I wiggle. "You smell so good!"

Suddenly, my Human appears at the woodpile and grabs my collar. "Stormy! I've been calling you!"

Her voice is muffled, but I smell my breakfast on her hands and dash toward the door.

The rain makes both of us wet.

Inside, I shake and all the rainwater flies off my coat. My Human never does the shake-off after she's been in the rain. Maybe she should learn from me. If she did the shake-off, she would be less grumpy about coming out in the rain to get me!

There is a spoonful of her yogurt in my bowl, which makes breakfast taste better.

After I have finished, I race around with my toy in my mouth. She grabs it from me and presses the squeaker. Sometimes I hear the high pitch. We play the throw-the-squeaky-toy game for three throws and then I get tired. I sit in front of her. She eats from her bowl of yogurt, and I raise my left paw and tap her knee.

"I know, Stormy," she says.

I tap her left knee again and she gives me her finger, covered with her yogurt. I lick until it's all gone.

We continue the game until the bowl is almost empty. She takes a spoonful of her yogurt and eats it. I tap her knee to remind her I am here and she should give me some yogurt. I always have to remind her, with a whine, not to eat everything in the yogurt bowl so I have something to lick!

After I lick the bowl, I rub my face alongside the couch and make sure to wipe off all of my breakfast and her yogurt. She returns with her cup of smelly coffee and pats the big chair beside her.

Sometimes I have to walk around in a circle to get enough momentum to jump on the chair with her; other times, I have to stare at the chair before I feel like my legs will

hold me for the jump. But today is a good old dog day, and I jump up with only one circle around the room.

It's a big chair and it holds both of us. I turn around and plop down beside her, tucking my knee that aches sometimes under me. I place my head on her lap, and she adjusts the blankets around both of us.

She pets me and I smell lots of love.

I close my eyes and drop into my deep sleep silence.

## VISITING SANTA



**M**y Human helps me jump into the car. "We are going to visit Santa!" She kisses the top of my head.

I can't hear her words very well, but she smells excited. I wiggle at her.

There is a lot of stop-and-go on our drive. She smells frustrated. My leg aches from all the holding on I've had to do trying to see out the window and stay balanced on the back seat.

I jump out of the car and sniff and do my business. My Human leads me into a big room. There are three Humans with dogs, and I bark. We sit in chairs that are in a big circle like my training class chairs. The waiting takes a long time.

We finally walk to an unreal tree and boxes wrapped in paper. I sniff at the boxes, but they don't smell like the boxes under our unreal tree. There is a package under our unreal tree that smells like spicy chicken. I keep trying to eat the paper off when my Human is not looking.

My Human tries to lift me on a bench, but she presses too hard against my sore leg and I yelp.

She sets me down and tells the man with the camera that I can't get up on the bench for my picture.

I can't hear her say all this, but I imagine that's what she's saying.

She brings me close to her side and tries to get me to sit. I don't want to sit and struggle to get away from her. Santa is not here, so I don't know why we are taking pictures by an unreal tree and boxes. We could do this at our unreal tree.

The Human takes our picture. He holds up a toy, but I look the other way. The deep silence surrounds me.

We walk back to the car and I hop inside. My Human hands me a treat.

I wiggle. No Santa pictures this year! Santa was a no-show!

A few weeks later, my Human leads me to the car. I have been defloofed and I am cold and shivery. My Human doesn't drive long. I jump out of the car and walk into a big room. A Human who smells like peppermint pets me and hands me tasty peanut butter treats.

We walk into a room and Santa sits by the fireplace. I pull hard on the leash, the way I do when I go to the Fur Cut Human. But my Human holds on tight and I can't move very far. Some little people stand behind us and I sniff at them. Their hands smell like sugar and cookies.

When it is our turn to meet Santa, we walk across the slippery floor. I try hard not to let my paws slide out from under me.

I place my paws on the fireplace and attempt to jump up,



but my Human removes my paws. Her mouth moves and I know she is saying, "No, Stormy," but I can't hear the words.

My Human sits down beside me on the floor. She turns me around so I am facing the camera Human. Santa joins us on the floor and sits on the other side of me. I lean against Santa. His leg feels soft like my blanket. He pets me, and the man with the camera takes our picture. When my picture arrives in my Human's small box, she smells irritated. She prints the pictures and places them beside the picture with me and the unreal tree and the boxes. In both pictures, I am not looking at the camera.

A few sleeps later, we go to Mom Human's house. There are many very good-smelling packages under the tree. Some are for me. Some are for Thumbelina. Some are for the animals who live with Sister Human.

I help everyone make cookies and lick the dishes in the dishwasher. I also sniff the boxes under the tree. I can't stay away.

Mom Human yells at me to get out from under the tree and stop sniffing the packages. But I am in great silence and can't hear her.

She walks over and drags me out from under the tree.

"Don't be angry with me, Mom Human," I blink my eyes at her. "Remember you once gave me Human food for the first time."

On package opening day, my Human drags me to the tree and tries to place me between her legs.

"No," I squirm. This is the third Santa picture and I am tired of them.

Mom Human doesn't get a good picture of us either.

But my Human still lines them up on the mantle. Thumbelina tries to jump and knock my pictures to the ground. My Human stops her and carries her out of the room. I stare at my Santa pictures. There are so many pictures that they cover the mantel. Some pictures are tucked behind others, and I can barely see myself. I stare at my pictures for a long time. I am finally just like my dog family. I have a wall of pictures!

I am magnificent!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Stormy would like to thank the following people for helping him become magnificent: Julie at Wag on Inn in Lake Stevens for sending the letter to his Human and asking if she'd be interested in a Cocker Spaniel. Audrey Hoyt who raised the best litter of Cocker Spaniels, Becky Bishop at Puppy Manners for playdates and puppy lessons. His first dog friends, Buster and Charlie and their Human, Gary Marks. Stormy's beach dog pals: Callie, and her owner Stacy Benefield, Pika and his owner, Ginny Wright, Vinny and his owner, Lisa Kerr, and all the other north end Cannon Beach dogs—you know who you are! Hailey, who was Stormy's favorite dog greeter at the pet shop, Dogs Allowed. Stormy's neighbor pack and their owner, Kathy Mackal, who chase the chipmunks out of their yard to his woodpile. Fetch in Cannon Beach for treats, chews, and doggy ice cream. His groomers: Lisa Lang at You Dirty Dog in Snohomish and Eve at Oswego Veterinary Hospital Grooming. Larry W. Bliven and his team at Mountain View Animal Hospital in Snohomish, Washington who kept Stormy healthy in his early years and Dr Matt Didlake and his team at Nehalem Animal Healing who keeps Stormy going in his later years. Deni Greene and Big Ears Max who shared dog stories in Art

Hour. Susan and Rich Lampe for their great homes with lots of land and woods. Dog Twitter for giving him a voice. And a special woof to Becca Hardwick, who read every episode of his Kindle Vella story and worked as the copy editor of his print book.

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Mindy Hardwick holds an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Vermont College. Her published middle grade books include: *Stained Glass Summer*, *Some Stories Are Not Seen*, and *Seymour's Secret*. She also writes sweet contemporary romance including her Cranberry Bay Series: *Sweetheart Cottage* and *Sweetheart Summer*. Mindy facilitated a poetry workshop for teens at Denney Juvenile Justice Center and wrote about the experience in her memoir, *Kids in Orange: Voices from Juvenile Detention*.

Mindy can often be found walking with Stormy, on the north Oregon Coast beaches and keeping up his Twitter. She loves to talk to schools and as a teacher herself knows her way around the tools of virtual learning as well as in person workshops. Visit her website: [www.mindyhardwick.com](http://www.mindyhardwick.com) to find out about new releases, upcoming events or to book her to speak to your class or school group.



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