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their dog's point of view

# IN THE DOGHOUSE



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# **IN THE DOGHOUSE**

**TERI CASE**

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*In loving memory of Marie, Mama Cat, Dickie Bird,  
and Kimo*



**SKIP**

A DOG'S LIFE

**W**hoever thinks a dog's life is easy has no idea what they're talking about, and they certainly don't understand a thing about unconditional love.

My Lucy is crying again but with noise this time. Her pain hurts my ears and twists my guts, but her silent tears seemed louder and more painful, if that makes sense to humans. Sometimes she stops breathing and gasps for air, like I do when I don't heel and pull too hard on my leash. Sometimes a groan makes its way from her stomach to her feet, and I swear it vibrates and echoes through the floorboards and into each room. And sometimes I can feel a wave of fresh tears coming like a rainstorm, before Lucy even knows she's going to cry them.

I'm sure the downstairs neighbors can hear her wails through the floor, but they must be used to it after four days. Normally, the teenage boy, Thomas, who lives with his mom, gets upset at loud noises and shouts, "Too loud! Too loud! Too loud!" Maybe crying doesn't count because I haven't heard him complain.

It's eating me up inside that it's my fault John left us. Even if I could find the words, I'd never be able to tell her how sorry I am. And that I'm scared too. Lucy's not the only one John has left behind. She's not the only one praying he'll change his mind and come back to us or wondering what the heck we're going to do without him.

Her blond hair is wet and plastered against the side of her face, where she's been brushing her torrential downpour of tears. I lean forward to lick the tears from her salty cheeks, but she turns me away.

"Not now, Skip," she says.

Even now, she's beautiful to me. I know it's not right to say so when her face is red and her eyes are puffy from too much grief, but it's true. With her face clear of makeup, and her damp hair and rumpled clothes, she reminds me of the many times we've been caught walking in the San Francisco rain. Only then, she laughs. Smiles. She has the best smile in the world.

A walk was the first thing we did together when she and John brought me home seven years ago, and if it hadn't been so late and if the next day hadn't been a workday, I think we could've walked all night long. That was the first time she sat next to me, leaned her forehead against mine, and whispered, "You're perfect for me." I get teary thinking about it. She's been perfect for me too.

Pacing seems to help. Checking her phone, though? Not so much. Because it's not bleeping or dinging, and that silence means no John. I hate those phones and how people are always looking down at them. My paws have been stepped on more than once by a hunched-over human not paying attention to where they are going. But I digress.

A long walk would do us some good. We could both use



some fresh air and activity. We need to burn off some of this pent-up negative energy. And I need to urinate. Heck, we haven't been on a proper walk since John left. Lucy has been opening the back door so I can relieve myself in the complex's backyard. To get there I have to head down four flights of stairs—dark, narrow, and steep servant-stairs typical of old San Francisco's apartment-converted Victorian homes. We share the stairs with our top-floor neighbor, "Hoarding Manny." That's what John and Lucy call him. The nickname makes Manny sound older and less handsome than he really is, though. I'm guessing he's about Lucy's age, thirty-two-ish, and he has a strong, confident walk.

Our shared back door steps are riddled with Manny's stacks of dirty terra-cotta pots and bags of potting soil he insists he's going to use someday. That's what he tells the offsite property manager every time John and Lucy complain about his "hot mess all over the place." Right now, the only one using the pots and soil is the damn stray cat that sprays all over them. Pisses John off. No pun intended. Or I guess I should say, *pissed* John off. Still no pun intended.

I'm tired of winding my way down four creaking flights to reach the yard, but I think Lucy feels self-conscious and doesn't want to run into anyone we know at the dog park and answer a bunch of questions, like, "Where's John today?" or "How are the wedding plans going?"

She asks me, "How could he leave us? What will I tell people?"

It's one of the few times I've been glad I can't speak human, so I don't have to answer. Mostly, I'd love to talk a human's ears off. I'm a dog with a lot to say. But just now, I

don't need to add lying to my list of how I've been an unfaithful companion.

I've lost count of how many times she's said, "He'll be back," to me, herself, and the empty spot on the couch where John always sat. But she says it more like a question: *He'll be baaaack?* And when the answer isn't forthcoming, I can smell her fear and need for reassurance. Fear and need smell more alike than humans might think. And neither one smells good. They're vinegary. Corrosive. Like you're being eaten from the inside out. Neediness is *no bueno* for the nose.

My natural order of senses is first smell, then sight, and last is sound. Tasting and smelling at once is one of my canine superpowers and usually a good thing. If something smells good about a person, I want to take a deep breath, stick out my tongue, and savor their scent and vibe. If they'll let me, I'll shove my nose deep between their legs and take a good long whiff, but most humans aren't comfortable with such public interest. Plus, humans are backward. They operate in the order of sight, sound, smell. They don't know what they're missing. They really don't.

*Sigh.*

When someone smells bad or needy or vulnerable, it makes me anxious, like I have to be in charge. Like I'm supposed to do something, only I have no idea what I should do. The pressure makes me defensive, and my white fur will stand up all along my spine. I feel responsible, protective . . . and torn. I'm kind of a two-sided dog. I have the looks and instincts for survival of my Timber Wolf mother but the calm, submissive demeanor of my Labrador father. Mama was a natural leader. My dad was a natural follower. How they met, I have no idea.

I may look like Mama, but I take after my father's side of the family. I'm a cuddler at heart. John was the boss, and I was cool with our arrangement. I'm not alpha-material, but I'm afraid that Lucy is even less alpha-ish than I am. She's not eating. She's not sleeping. And we all know what it means when humans stop eating—she can't take care of herself. A few times, she has reminded me of Soft Voice, my owner when I was born, who had a house and a gigantic yard with Strong Voice. When I was one month old, Soft Voice gave me, Mama, and my brothers and sisters to the pound after Strong Voice "went on to greener pastures" and she couldn't take care of us on her own. That I'm even thinking about Soft Voice and losing my first family is the perfect example of how John's leaving is messing with my head too.

I'm a dog. I'm wired to live in the now. I've got NOW DNA. I'm not supposed to think about the past or the future, but that's all I've been able to do these past four days. Dwelling on yesterday and hoping for tomorrow is something humans love to do, but it's no way for a dog to live. *No, sir.*

*Focus on the now, Skip. Focus.* I've been mentally coaching myself to take the lead in John's, hopefully temporary, absence. The idea came to me instinctively—not because I want to lead, but I'm a pack animal, and when I see a need, I have to fill it whether I like it or not. It's compulsory. I once heard that females in a wolf pack will all start producing milk when another female has a litter. They do this just in case something happens to the mama or the mama's milk. Amazing, right? They are all for one and one for all.

Lucy's not getting her exercise. *We're* not getting our exercise. I've got to suck it up and do something.

*All for one and one for all.*

I pick up my leash and carry it to her. Time to take her on a walk. She needs to clear her head and prepare for the workweek to come. Tomorrow is Monday and she starts her new job as the head geriatrics nurse and wellness director at a retirement home. Sure, the timing isn't ideal with John leaving, but she's been waiting to transfer from trauma to geriatrics for a few years. Somehow, I have to help her pull herself together.

"I'll open the back door for you," she says and blows her nose.

*Nope. No more backyard. We're going for a walk.* I yip and drag my leash to the front door, the clip scraping annoyingly against the hardwood floor. When I reach the door, I get my bark on. I'm annoying enough that after a few attempts, she stands up and says, "Okay, give me a minute."

The bathroom door closes behind her. I drop my leash, confident she is getting ready to go out with me. I'm not letting her off the hook. Through the door, I hear her sniffle and open the medicine cabinet. The distinct rattle of pills catches my attention. She always says, "Nothing gets past you." Nope it doesn't, not when it comes to sound anyway.

I'll just get her fleece and put it by the door for her. As I return to the hallway with her favorite pullover, I hear her turn the knob. Unfortunately, at the same time I hear the key sliding into the front door lock.

Just as Lucy steps into the hall, John opens the front door.

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**SKIP**

UNPACKED

**W**e all freeze. At first, Lucy and John don't say anything and have eyes only for each other. It reminds me of their silent exchange at the pound when I first met them and when they could read each other's minds. The contrast is startling because they might be staring at each other now, but they're not communicating a darn thing. *Zilch*. They're acting more like wary strangers. Like they are sizing each other up—the same way I do whenever a new dog shows up at my dog park and I'm not sure if he's a friend or a foe.

And me? I'm standing between them, smack dab in the middle. Unfortunately, it's a place I've been a lot over the past several weeks—polarized by Lucy's hopeful expression and John's scent-de-Cecilia's biscuits, which tells me he hasn't been alone.

*Cecilia. Our ruination.*

Lucy and I wait together, uncertain if John is coming home or if he's just taking the last of his things and leaving us behind like unwanted leftovers or a forgotten doggy bag.

*I know. I know. I sound bitter and hurt, but that's because I am bitter and hurt.*

John breaks the silence. "I should've knocked. Sorry, old habit. Skip, come here, buddy."

I wish he would've said Lucy's name first, but the three of us have been this way ever since John's mood changed a few months ago, and it became easier for him to interact with Lucy about me rather than discuss their upcoming wedding and honeymoon or our pack's future together. In the past, John and Lucy have said how sad it is that their married friends who've become parents only talk about their babies. Many times, Lucy has said, "When we have children, we're not going to forget our relationship exists too." And John always said, "That's a deal."

I guess the deal didn't include dogs.

*Should I go to him?* I'm mad at him for leaving us and putting me in this horrible predicament, but he's making his irresistible cute kissy noises. His thick light-brown bangs slide forward over his forehead as he pats his knee, beckoning me. I'm confused because I've always done what John has told me to do, so I look up at Lucy. *Tell me what to do*, I implore her with my eyes. *Lead me*, I beg.

"Come here, Skip," John says again. "Or are you mad at me too?"

Lucy reaches over and pats my head. "Stay." Only I can't tell if she is telling me to stay or entreating John not to go.

"I'm not mad, John," she says. "I'm confused and hurt."

John clears his throat, and when he speaks, his voice is deep and rough. "Lucy—"

She interrupts. "Have you changed your mind?" The hope in her voice is so heavy I close my eyes, and my long

flat tongue goes dry. You know how I feel about negative smells. Her desperation is oozing from her pores. John remains silent. He doesn't know it, but he smells her desperation too. Humans don't like it either. To me, it smells like dried sticky syrup that can get stuck in your fur for days and adheres to the floor when you're napping. Hurts like a son of a bitch when you jump to your feet and lose some hair in the process.

John closes his eyes and squeezes the bridge of his nose. He does this whenever he doesn't want to sneeze or cry. I used to catch him doing this during sad movies. Sometimes, he'd bury his face in my fur, pretending to hug me, but he was really using me as a Kleenex. I never minded. He is—was—the top dog of our pack, and he needed to hide his weaknesses.

“No,” he says, “I just need to know you're going to be okay.” He takes a step closer.

I stand on all fours, not sure what will happen next when Lucy's energy shifts a bit, but I stay at her side, where I've been for the past four days.

Lucy purses her lips, shakes her head, and puts her hand up, palm forward. She does the same to me whenever she wants me to immediately stop what I'm doing. John knows the signal, so he stops too.

“Why?” she growls. “So *you'll* feel better?” She says it like a question, but she isn't really asking.

If I could talk, I'd warn John: *Back off before she bites you.*

“It's not like that,” he says.

“It's exactly like that. You came over here to get *me* to reassure *you* that everything is going to be okay. Well, guess what?” Her arm is shaking as she leans on my head like one

of those sticks that old people don't throw but take on walks with them. They're actually called *canes*, but people like to sound hip and healthy, so they call them *sticks*. "It's not okay. I feel stupid, like a fool. I have no idea what has happened between us or why you've changed your mind about us," she says. "Feel better now?"

He leans forward, "You're not a fool. You're amazing. I just need to be alone. I don't want to end up like my parents."

"Your parents? We're nothing like your parents."

John shakes his head. "It's not you. This is my problem."

"Your problem?" Lucy lifts her chin. "Believe me, it's my problem too. What about the past ten years? What about everything we've worked for? Do those years mean so little? So little that 'being alone' sounds better?"

I'm surprised by how strong, clear, and angry her voice is all of a sudden. The kind of angry that makes me tuck my tail, hang my head in shame, and run for another room when it's aimed at me after chewing something I shouldn't have chewed. (Not that I ever do this, mind you. At least not since I was a pup.) If not for Lucy's inflamed face, I'd have a hard time convincing anyone of how fragile she's been.

"What am I missing? What happened?" she asks. "I need—deserve—a better explanation than you 'want to be alone.' We're supposed to be getting married in five months. Our honeymoon is planned . . ." She lets her sentence trail off as if hoping John will offer a positive ending to it. I hope she doesn't hold her breath for one because John and I know what "wants to be alone" really means.

"Don't you love me anymore?" she asks.



Instead of looking at Lucy, John looks long and hard at me.

*Oh shit.*

I can read his mind. I can read his slumping shoulders, slack jaw, and heavy lids. They all add up to defeat and his desperate need to confess and be guilt-free.

The hackles on the back of my shoulders and neck rise in alarm.

People think confessing something bad is the right thing to do, but it's not. It's selfish. A confession just helps the person in the wrong feel better while it makes the innocent person feel like a piece of crap. No good comes of confessions. The truth might set John free, but it will destroy my life permanently. He's going to tell Lucy about Cecilia—*she-who-Lucy-knows-nothing-about*—and Lucy will hate us both forever. There will be no second chance for our pack. No possibility of reconciliation even if *he* changes his mind. And she'll take me to the pound for my betrayal, for being the one who introduced him to his new woman.

When John releases a long, slow breath as if he is gearing up for a dogfight, I know what I have to do. I need to make him leave. *Now*. Before he spills the beans and blows our pack and our lives to smithereens.

I start barking like a rabid dog. The more they tell me to be quiet, the louder and faster I bark. I howl until they can't hear themselves think, much less hear each other speak, and I'm not going to stop. I don't even stop when I hear Thomas yell from downstairs, "Too loud! Too loud! Too loud!"

It's one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. But I drive John out the door. Our secret is safe.

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**SKIP**

DIRTY DOG

I know what people are thinking even though they haven't heard the whole story yet. They're thinking, *John-the-dirtbag-human-cheater*. They're wrong. He's not a dirtbag. They don't know him like I do. Like Lucy does. He's made some bad choices lately, but we love him, and he's earned our love.

But he strayed. It can happen to the best of us, and if I'd paid more attention the day we met Cecilia two months ago, I could have warned him about the perils of greener grass and avoided this entire mess. Not that I can see green: I only see grays, but I know new grass when I smell it. And who doesn't love a fresh patch of new grass to run in or roll around in? *The old grass, that's who.*

John was working from home that week while his law office was being re-floored, so on an afternoon walk, he took me to a new dog park Lucy had told us about. It was farther away and not our usual path, so I had a lot of marking to do. Every smell—I mean every doggone smell—

sight, and person was new. I was on sensory overload and loving every minute of it. My nose was to the ground, which meant I was missing John's hand signals and whistles.

"Someone's a little too excited," he said and put on my leash, which he only does when he thinks my safety is at risk or if some silly person who doesn't know the first thing about me drives by and yells, "Leash law!"

When we got to the park, he released me. "Go play."

And that's when I smelled her: a gorgeous well-bred Australian Shepherd.

Love at first scent.

She was the collar to my leash, the marrow to my bone, and the stuffing to my tennis ball. I was in pheromone heaven.

I made a beeline for her and gave her a closer sniff. And just like that, I was under her spell. I climbed on top of her right then and there. Couldn't have stopped myself if I'd wanted to. I was a mounting maniac—though for all intents and purposes, out of service, if you know what I mean. It was just for show, a natural reflex.

A woman shouted, "Come here, Bunny!"

The Australian Shepherd responded with a bark but didn't move. Her name was Bunny. *Beautiful Bunny*.

John caught up to me and nudged my rump with the toe of his shoe. "Down, Skip. You horndog."

Bunny's woman wagged her finger at me and then at Bunny. "You better watch out for this one, Buns."

At first I didn't notice much about the woman other than she smelled really really really good—mouthwatering good like treats—and that she was tall, much taller than our Lucy, which isn't difficult.

John introduced himself. “Sorry about that. He’s a little fired up today. It’s his first time at this park.”

“Your first time here, too, then. I thought you were a new face. I’m Cecilia.”

They shook hands.

“Well,” she asked, “can we trust these two to go play and keep it clean?”

John laughed, but to me there was nothing dirty about how I was feeling. *Dude, blame biology, not the dog.*

“Only one way to find out,” John said. “Mind your manners, Skip.” He waved toward the field, and Bunny and I took off.

Man oh man, the way Bunny moved when she ran and jumped—the bitch could turn on a dime. *Yowza.* She played hard-to-get at first, but then she started nipping at my hind ankles, and we all know what that means. *Hubba-hubba, baby.*

Now and then, she and I looked over our shoulders to make sure our masters were still there. At the time, it seemed so nice and convenient how John and Cecilia kept each other company while we ran around. Later—I’m not sure how much time passed, even though I’m usually really good about keeping track—they called our names. They were ready to go.

“Goodbye, Skip,” Cecilia said, offering me one of the best biscuits I’d ever had.

John winked at me and said, “Bow.”

I put my right front paw forward and lowered my snout to the ground. John taught me to bow after I refused to learn to shake. Truth is, I *pretend* I don’t know how to shake. It’s a matter of principle. Until humans start greeting me by turning their backside and letting me stick my nose up their

butts, I refuse to shake hands or paws when I meet one of them. So, despite all the treats offered and the entreaties that Lucy and John have made in my lifetime, I've yet to shake their hands or any other human's.

"Aha," Cecilia smiled and curtsied, pulling her long skirt up at the sides, "handsome and gallant after all, just like your owner."

As far as friendly dog owner banter goes, her comment seemed fairly innocent at the time. And being overstimulated, I ignored the subtle shift in John's behavior and the nuances of chemistry bouncing between him and Cecilia.

In hindsight, I recognize that John swaggered most of the way home that day, but I'd had a swagger of my own, thanks to Bunny. So I guess I had been a bit self-absorbed.

That night when Lucy got home from work and the three of us were relaxing in the living room, John told her we'd gone to the new park. She asked a lot of questions, mostly about me. Did I like it? Was I good with the other dogs?

I cringed, worrying that John would tell her about my surge of hormones and the "humping incident," and then, of course, he did.

Lucy looked at me, squinting, and tried to hide her pretty smile, but she couldn't help herself. In her Chihuahua voice, she sang, "Skip has a girlfriend. Skip has a girlfriend."

John never mentioned Bunny's master.

The thing is, like I've mentioned before, I'm wired to live in the here and now, and when my life is going well, I thrive in the moment. So it shouldn't surprise anyone that the very next day when John and I headed out for our afternoon walk and he gave me permission to walk ahead, I

turned toward the new park. I was hot on my own trail-blazing from the day before. I had newish territory to reclaim. A fence post here. A stop sign there. I was off-leash, so it took me a few sniffs and markings to realize that John wasn't following me. When I turned to look for him, he was standing at the crossroad between our usual dog park and the new dog park.

"Not a good idea, buddy. Let's go to our usual place," he said.

I walked back to John, and I begged. I begged him to go to the new park again. The kind of begging a dog can't be proud about.

Now I know that I mistook his hesitant body language for laziness.

He finally caved. "I guess you really want to see Bunny again."

I barked several times. Indeed, I did want to see her again. Bunny was the first female dog I'd ever felt so drawn to. Lucy once told me that wolves mated for life, and that was why she chose me. At the time, I thought Bunny might be my lifetime mate. Not once did I wonder how that would work with our current pack.

But back to John and that fateful day.

"Okay, but this is the last time. Trust me. This isn't your best idea," he said.

*Ah, dog's best friend.* A true wingman understands we are all animals at heart. Primal. Always looking to procreate and sow our oats—even if said oats have been snipped like mine. I still wanted to go for it and be the alpha to Bunny like John was alpha to Lucy. John had my back.

Or so I thought.

I didn't have to beg the next three days. My last time at

the new park was TGIF day. All the humans were saying it to each other: *TGIF! Woo hoo!* A dog really picks up on that kind of happiness from people. Their tones are lighter. Shoulders relaxed. Heads tilted. Smiles for everyone.

On that last visit, I retrieved Bunny's ball from a bully of a Rottweiler, and I looked over to see John's reaction to my prowess, only to find him standing really—I mean really—close to Cecilia and tucking a strand of her curly auburn hair behind her ear. I could read John's thoughts with his broad shoulders rolled back, chest expanded, his head bent intently, and only a handful of inches separating his and Cecilia's noses, lips, and tongues. I stood with the ball clamped between my dumbfounded jaws. My ears began to ring, and my fur rose on my back.

*Uh-oh.* I knew that stance, that look. I'd seen him stand that way with Lucy. Our Lucy. I knew what John was saying without saying a thing.

*Oh no you don't, John. We've got Lucy.*

Humans don't share. That's the first rule a dog learns: *humans don't share tail.* They'll share food, clothes, furniture, balls, and blankets, but when it comes to each other, no sharing allowed. Not ever. Look, but don't touch. That's it. I've seen humans get jealous just for looking. One time, John got jealous when he thought Lucy was ogling our neighbor Manny's jeans-covered tuchus during one of the rare moments we were entering the building at the same time.

Cecilia cupped John's hand, leaning her cheek into his palm.

John was in trouble. I had to save him. *Pronto.* I torpedoed Bunny's ball to her and hightailed my way back to John. I picked up my leash at his feet and ran off, refusing

to look back, and I ignored his commands to return. My senses were in hyperdrive, and drool poured from my jowls. My nose was sweating. All I could think was, *Must get home. Keep John safe.*

His voice grew louder as he chased me, and he was clearly annoyed with me, but I stayed on course and kept making my way home. I had a job to do, and it was to train him to not stray. He needed to heel. He was being a very bad boy.

I waited until we were a block away from the park to stop on the corner and let him catch up. A woman walking by said, "Look at the good dog holding his own leash."

*Right, lady. If you only knew how capable I am.*

"Damn it, Skip, what was that about? You've never run off before." John was huffing and puffing.

I wanted to say, "Well, you haven't either until now," but I couldn't, so instead, I dropped my leash to the ground and stared him in the eyes: *I saw you.* I had no intention of blinking before he did. Dogs don't stare their alpha down for nothing. Eye contact is serious business and not to be ignored.

He looked away. I was sure I had made my point. He leaned over and picked up my leash, and I let him snap it to my collar. Then he ran his palm across my crown.

"You're right," he said. "What am I doing? The grass isn't always greener."

*I love green grass.* I sighed and stood to all fours. I wanted to pretend he was talking about the dog park and the field, but I'm a dog. I get it. We're all animals. It's biology. We want as many chances as we can get with our female counterparts. I mean, I had to give him a break. He still has testicles. I can't be a hypocrite. I can't even begin to



imagine how I'd be in the world today if I had mine. It's bad enough sometimes I still get a phantom surge of, I don't know, something, and still mount up. Humans call it testosterone, but I call it *life*—and I do things to pillows that make everyone uncomfortable. Kind of how I jumped on Bunny the first time I saw her. I'm not proud. I'm honest. So how could I expect John to stop if I can't even control myself at times?

*Males. We disgust me sometimes.*

"We okay?" he asked me. "No more Cecilia. I get it." He tested the leash, and at that point, I willingly moved with him. Improved behavior deserved a reward, even if it was just taking a walk together.

*Yeah, we're okay, but I'll be watching you.*

That Friday night when Lucy came home from her shift at the hospital, she asked John about his day. He didn't say anything about our walk or which park we'd gone to, but when she suggested we could all go to the new park on her day off, John told her he preferred our neighborhood park. They talked about his week working from home and whether he was ready to go back to the office on Monday, and he said, "Yeah, it was a good week, but time to go back to reality."

I laid my head on his leg. *Good boy, John. Good boy.*

THE LAST TIME I saw Cecilia was several weeks ago when John and I accidentally—or so I thought—stumbled upon her new dog biscuit bakery.

We were walking back from my annual checkup with the vet when John said, "I'm taking you somewhere special."

And boy was it. I could smell the dozen or so dogs socializing at the sidewalk café a mile away.

“It’s a café, just for dogs, Skip,” John said.

*Say what? Dog-damn brilliant.* I thought I was in dog heaven just until I smelled her. Bunny. *Oh, oh.* No matter how cool the place, John and I had to get out of there. Stat! I tugged on the leash, but I was too slow. At about the same time that Bunny stopped beside me, You Know Who asked, “John? Is that you?”

Now John, as I remember it, was totally cool. I mean cool like bored cool. His shoulders didn’t roll back. His chest didn’t puff up. He kept me by his side as he greeted Cecilia. I followed them around as she offered to give him a tour of the joint. She gave me a few extra biscuits. One was peanut butter. One was cheesy. Both were delicious.

In a nutshell, they behaved, so I wasn’t worried. Unfortunately, I must have missed something because even though I never saw Cecilia again, a few weeks later, her biscuit scent was all over John. That’s when everything began to change.

John grew quieter and started taking walks without me. As far as I’m concerned, that’s canine treason. One afternoon he came home from his office and changed into a fresh set of work clothes—not home clothes, like usual—just before Lucy got home from the hospital. He moved his clothes hamper to our small laundry room. Later, I tipped over the basket to sniff out my suspicions. I smelled what I was looking for just before Lucy came in and chastised me.

“No, Skip. What are you looking for? Your ball is in the living room.” She shook out John’s clothes, and I almost fainted as John’s and Cecilia’s comingled scents exploded

into the room, but Lucy just tossed the clothes in the wash, unfazed.

Remember that I told you humans smell last? Sometimes I think they ignore smell altogether. I'd like to say Cecilia reeks, but she doesn't. She smells like the peanut butter treats she makes at her bakery and like Bunny. And she's been right under Lucy's nose for weeks now.




## ABOUT THE AUTHOR





Teri Case is the award-winning author of *Tiger Drive*. A native Nevadan, she now lives in Washington, D.C., during the summer and in Clearwater, Florida, each winter. She often travels—watching, learning, and writing about people who want to matter. *In the Doghouse* is her second novel.

[www.tericase.com](http://www.tericase.com)

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